

**6** WORLD

● Iran's acting president addresses new parl after helicopter crash

● EU-Israel relations take a nosedive as Spain

**8** NATION

● Architect of modern India: Cong pays tributes to Nehru on death anniversary

● INDIA govt to scrap Agnipath scheme, says Rahul

## Soaring mercury levels come down ● Red alert sounded in several state dists

# Remal effect: Assam braces for heavy rain

GUWAHATI, May 27: Several districts of Assam are on high alert in the wake of forecast for heavy to extremely heavy rainfall from Monday under the impact of Cyclone Remal, which made landfall in neighbouring West Bengal and Bangladesh.

The administration has urged people to maintain safety measures, and set up helpline numbers in case of emergency.

The Northeast Frontier Railway, in a release, said 42 trains have been cancelled for two days from Monday.

Several parts of Assam, including Guwahati, received rainfall since late Sunday evening, bringing down soaring mercury levels in the state.

No reports of damage due to the impact of the cyclone have been received yet, official sources said. "Cyclone Remal can bring in-



clement weather in parts of Assam. We are taking several precautionary measures," chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said on X.

He added that teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and the State Disaster Re-

sponse Force (SDRF) are on standby and control rooms are operational, while asking people to cooperate with local administration. An Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA) release said (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 2 die as Cyclone Remal ravages parts of Bengal

KOLKATA, May 27: At least two persons died in West Bengal and its coastal areas suffered extensive damage to infrastructure and property, as Cyclone Remal tore through the state and neighbouring Bangladesh with winds speeds reaching 135 km per hour, officials said Monday.

A man died of his injuries when a wall collapsed due to the relentless downpour on Sunday evening at the Bibir Bagan area of Entally in Central Kolkata, a state disaster management official said. An elderly woman in

the Mousuni Island near Namkhana adjacent to the Sunderbans delta also succumbed to injuries on Monday morning, following a tree collapse on her hut that resulted in the roof caving in, the official said.

After tearing through the coasts of Bangladesh and West Bengal, Cyclone Remal left a trail of destruction with pictures of devastation becoming evident across the state's coastal areas, with extensive damage to infrastructure and property, soon after daybreak on Monday. (PTI)

## BJP govt will take oath in Odisha on June 10: Himanta

PATKURA / KAKATPUR (ODISHA), May 27: Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday claimed that a BJP government will take oath in Odisha on June 10.

Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are being held simultaneously in Odisha.

"As per my prediction, we (BJP) have got almost a majority in the first three phases of assembly election in Odisha. Only very few seats are left to form a government and that will be filled up on June 1," he said while addressing election rallies at Patkura and Kakatpur.

Three phases of polling for the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections in the state is over. The fourth and final phase will be held on June 1 for six Lok Sabha constituencies and 42 Assembly segments.

"I would like to say one thing the BJP government will take oath on June 10. We have to send Pandian (BJD leader V K Pandian) back to

Tamil Nadu on June 11," he said. If the state gets a good government then Odisha can become the number one state in the country.

"Today, the youth of Odisha are migrating to other states due to unemployment. On the other hand, one lakh government posts are lying vacant in the state and the Odia youth are not being employed in local industries", Sarma said.

He claimed after the BJP government is formed in Odisha, the one lakh vacant posts will be filled up within a year.

The natural resources of Odisha are being transferred to outsiders, he alleged. Slamming the BJD government's ST (transformative initiative) model of governance, the senior BJP leader said, "One 'T' means teamwork. Is there any teamwork in Odisha? The elected MLAs, MPs and ministers don't have any power to exercise. Here only a team exists... (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

### HT BRIEFS

#### ASDC complaint

DIPHU: The Autonomous State Demand Committee (ASDC) has submitted a complaint on recent attempt to encroach land at Tahpat and Langkeroi villages in the inter-state border of West Karbi Anglong from Meghalaya to the chief minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma and chief executive member (CEM) of Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC), Tuliram Ronghang. The ASDC said on May 2 some miscreants from Meghalaya has burnt down a police patrolling camp at Tahpat and on May 22 a group of people from Meghalaya has again entered inside Karbi Anglong for constructing drain at Philangpi Anglong located between Tahpat and Langkeroi village. The ASDC in its memorandum has reminded the CM about his assurance made to the ASDC delegation in 2023 and second meeting on March 12, 2024 here at Arboretum cum Craft Centre, that the border land of West Karbi Anglong will be protected.

#### Eight held

GUWAHATI: At least eight people were arrested for allegedly transporting illicit liquor in two separate seizures in Assam's Guwahati, officials said on Monday. In the first case, the Excise Department of Kamrup Metropolitan district seized 580 litres of country liquor on Saturday in Jalukbari area of the city, an official said. The excise sleuths also seized two vehicles in which the liquor consignment was being transported and arrested six people, she added. In the second instance, the Excise officials arrested two persons from Sonapur area while 26 cartons of Indian Made Foreign Liquor (IMFL) were being readied to sell in Meghalaya. "The sleuths seized the liquor and two vehicles. They also arrested two persons from the spot," the official added.

## Kejriwal seeks extension of interim bail from SC to complete health check-up

NEW DELHI, May 27: Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has sought extension of his interim bail by seven days from the Supreme Court to undergo a host of medical tests, including a PET-CT scan in view of his "sudden and unexplained weight loss, coupled with high ketone levels", which are indicative of kidney, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer.

Kejriwal, in his plea filed on May 26, said he will surrender back to jail on June 9, instead of June 2, the scheduled date for his return to prison.

"The appellant prays for an extension of his interim bail by a week, during which the Appellant can get the prescribed tests done and obtain results of the same. The Appellant will get all these tests done in the working week from June 3 (Monday) to June 7 (Fri-

day) and then surrender on the weekend, i.e. June 9," the fresh plea, according to the sources, said. The top court had on May 10 granted 21-day interim bail to the chief minister, who was arrested in a money laundering case linked to the excise policy 'scam', to enable him to campaign for the Lok Sabha polls.

### Money laundering

It had directed that Kejriwal shall surrender on June 2, a day after the last phase of the seven-phase poll gets over.

The fresh plea, which is likely to be taken up in the coming days by a vacation bench, said during the incarceration from March 21 to May 10, the chief minister suffered a lot of health-related complications which are also "partly attributable to the negligent and callous behaviour of the jail authorities". Kejriwal lost around six to seven kg of weight (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## INDIA bloc leaders likely to meet on June 1 to assess LS poll performance, TMC to skip

NEW DELHI, May 27: The top leaders of the opposition INDIA bloc are likely to meet in the national capital on June 1 to assess their performance in the Lok Sabha elections and chalk out their strategy ahead of the results.

The sources said the proposed meeting will be convened in the afternoon of June 1 when the last phase of polling will be underway.

Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge, who is one of the senior-most leaders of the opposition bloc, has convened the meeting, they said. The sources in the Trinamool Congress (TMC) said party supremo Mamata Banerjee, general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and other top leaders will be voting on the day and hence, will be unable to attend the meeting and pointed out that the party has so far attended all meetings of the opposition bloc.

The TMC has conveyed this to the organisers, the sources added.

Voting will take place on nine seats in West Bengal on June 1, including two seats in Kolkata - Kolkata Dakshin and Kolkata Uttar.



The other constituencies that go to polls in the state include Jadavpur, Dum Dum, Barasat, Basirhat, Jayanagar, Mathurapur and Diamond Harbour.

During the meeting, the opposition leaders will discuss their strategy ahead of the June 4 results and assess their performance in the seven-phase elections, they said.

The opposition alliance has been claiming that it will be able to stop

the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) from returning to power at the Centre and cobble together a government of its own.

The first meeting of the opposition Indian National Developmental Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) bloc was held in Patna on June 23 last year, followed by a meeting in Bengaluru on July 17-18, 2023, and then in Mumbai between August 31 and (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Public funds allegedly misused for BJP leaders' Vietnam trip: Ji Kathar

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 27: The president of the All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHLC), Ji Kathar, has stirred controversy with claims that a trip undertaken by BJP leaders of Karbi Anglong to Vietnam cost a staggering ₹ 14 crore, allegedly drawn from public funds.

In a press conference held at his residence, Kathar accused the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) of funding the trip with money from the Panchayat and Rural Department (P&RD), igniting outrage over the purported misuse of government resources.

"It is unfortunate that the KAAC has not been able to fulfill its financial obligations, such as paying the bills of petty tribal contractors and ensuring salaries for teachers and employees of certain departments. Yet, they saw fit to allocate ₹ 14 crore from the public exchequer for a lavish trip to Vietnam," he alleged. Expressing (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## Karbi Anglong gears up for Lok Sabha polls counting

HT Bureau

DIPHU, May 27: With the impending counting of the 18 Lok Sabha election scheduled for June 4, Madhumita Bhagawati, the District Election Officer (DEO) and District Commissioner (DC) of Karbi Anglong, convened a press briefing on Monday to elucidate the meticulous preparations underway for the counting process.

The focus of the briefing centered on the counting procedures for the 6 - Diphu

(ST) Parliamentary Constituency, encompassing four election districts: Karbi Anglong, Bokajan, West Karbi Anglong, and Dima Hasao.

Bhagawati assured the media that all arrangements have been meticulously orchestrated in accordance with the regulations and guidelines stipulated by the Election Commission of India (ECI). She further informed that counting will commence promptly at 8 a.m. on the designated date.

The venues for the counting process have been strategically allocated, with ISBT, Chutianala chosen as the site for Karbi Anglong, the Government HS School premises designated for Bokajan, the Hamren Government HS School slated for West Karbi Anglong, and the DC office in Haflong earmarked for Dima Hasao. In terms of infrastructure, Bhagawati outlined the provision of separate counting halls for Howraghat LAC, Diphu LAC, and postal ballot counting (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

## 'After the laws come into effect, 90 per cent people will not have to go to courts'

# Aided by technology, new criminal laws will deliver justice within 3 years: Amit Shah

NEW DELHI, May 27: Technology will be a key enabler for the new criminal laws that come into effect July 1 as summons will be issued by SMS, 90 per cent witnesses will appear through video calls and courts will issue orders within three years of filing of an FIR, Union home minister Amit Shah has said.

"I can tell you with confidence that after three years, our criminal justice system will be the most modern criminal justice system in the world," he told PTI in an interview over the weekend.

Piloted by the home minister himself, the newly enacted criminal laws - the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita and the Bharatiya Sakshya Act will come into effect from July 1, replacing the colonial-era In-



dian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act of 1872 respectively.

In the interview, Shah laid out for the first time many details of the new criminal justice system, which he said are almost entirely driven by technology. For example, all court matters will become online and

from that data base of finger prints within seven and half minutes, he said.

"We have brought very big reforms (through the new criminal laws). After the laws come into effect, 90 per cent people will not have to go to courts. The witnesses will appear online," Shah said.

Earlier, he said, summon meant physically serving it to someone at their home. "Many such changes have been incorporated (in new laws). Similar is the case with regards to the charge sheet too," he said.

The home minister said earlier charge sheet meant submission of volumes of documents, but once the new laws come into force the charge sheet will be contained in a pen drive and the response to it can also be delivered digitally on a pen drive. (CONTD. ON PAGE-2)

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# Modi gov't reshaped Budget in 10 years, reforms to continue to make India developed nation: FM

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday said the Modi government has reshaped the Union budget in the last 10 years from a mere record of expenditure to a strategic blueprint for equitable distribution, and stressed that the pace of reforms will continue to make India a developed nation.

Sitharaman said the government will continue to maximise the value and impact of hard-earned taxpayer money, ensuring it is put to the best possible use for the benefit of all. The minister said the Modi government has prioritised transparency in its budgeting practices and numbers. Countries with transparent budgets are often viewed favourably by international bodies such as the IMF and the World Bank. This can lead to improved global trust.

"This starkly contrasts the [N-India-led UPA government's] repetitive practice of hiding the deficits through off-budget borrowings and issuance of 'Oil Bonds', which somewhat covertly shifted the fiscal burden to future generations. Under UPA, standard fiscal practices were routinely changed to make Budget numbers look favourable," Sitharaman said in a post on X.



She said the last decade has witnessed a substantial improvement in the sanctity and credibility of the Union Budget, leaving past constraints and archaic practices behind. "Our government has reshaped the budget from a mere record of expenditures into a strategic blueprint for equitable development. We make judicious & efficient use of every rupee collected from our taxpayers and give them a transparent picture of public finances," Sitharaman said.

The minister said the government has taken various reforms to strengthen and bring transparency to the budgetary process and prac-

tics. Since FY 2017-18, the budget presentation has been shifted to 1st February instead of the last working day in February. It effectively advanced the expenditure cycle by two months, she said. Sitharaman further said reform in government expenditure by bringing in Treasury Single Account (TSA) for the 'just-in-time' release of funds to autonomous bodies has lowered the borrowing costs for the Centre. "TSA has resulted in savings of more than ₹ 15,000 crores to date," she said.

Sitharaman said the Union government administers 108 Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS)

through state and UT governments, with a budget of approximately ₹5.01 lakh crore for FY 2024-25 and ₹ 4.76 lakh crore for FY 2023-24. Previously, it was challenging to ascertain the timeliness and amount of funds released to the implementing agencies under a CSS and to determine whether the funds were from the Centre or the state.

However, with the implementation of Single Nodal Agency (SNA), under which each state has to identify and designate a Single Nodal Agency (SNA) for every CSS, there have been savings of about ₹ 10,592 crore from 2021-22 to date. Sitharaman said the Union budgets under the Modi government are characterised by fiscal prudence, transparency, and inclusiveness, ensuring investments in social development and infrastructure. The Modi government, the minister said, is committed to harnessing cutting-edge technology, enhancing transparency, and pursuing ongoing reforms to lay a strong foundation for a Viksit Bharat.

"We will continue to maximise the value and impact of hard-earned taxpayer money, ensuring it is put to the best possible use for the benefit of all," she said. (PTI)

## Rupee falls 4 paise to close at 83.14 against US dollar

**MUMBAI, May 27:** The rupee pared its initial gains and settled for the day lower by 4 paise at 83.14 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, mirroring the benchmark indices that erased their gains and ended the day off their record-high levels. Forex traders said the rupee settled in a narrow range as the weakness of the American currency in the overseas market supported the rupee, while elevated crude oil prices in the international market restricted the upmove. At the interbank foreign exchange, the local unit opened at 83.08, then touched an intra-day high of 83.05 but soon pared the gains and settled for the day lower by 4 paise at 83.14 (provisional) against the American currency. On Friday, the rupee rallied for the fourth consecutive trading session and settled with a sharp gain of 19 paise at 83.10 against the US dollar.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 104.67, lower by 0.05 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, advanced 0.47 per cent to USD 82.51 per barrel. "We expect the rupee to trade with a positive bias on positive domestic equities and expectations of fresh foreign inflows. However, a strong US dollar and a recovery in crude oil prices may cap sharp upside," Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas said. US markets will remain closed on Monday on Memorial Day holiday. Investors may remain cautious ahead of core PCE price index data later this week. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of ₹ 82.80 to ₹ 83.30, Choudhary added. On the domestic macroeconomic front, India's forex reserves jumped USD 4.549 billion to a new all-time high of USD 648.7 billion for the week ended May 17, the Reserve Bank said on Friday. This is the third consecutive week of increase in the overall kitty, which had increased by USD 2.561 billion to USD 644.151 billion in the previous reporting week ended May 17.(PTI)

## Sensex scales 76,000 peak, Nifty hits new high before closing lower

**MUMBAI, May 27:** Sensex scaled the 76,000 level for the first time while Nifty hit a new lifetime peak before closing marginally down on Monday as investors booked profits at record levels amid high volatility ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls. The 30-share BSE Sensex closed lower by 19.89 points or 0.03 per cent lower at 75,390.50. Intra-day, the barometer climbed 599.29 points or 0.79 per cent to an all-time peak of 76,009.68 following gains in select banking, financial and IT shares. However, investors preferred to book profits at record levels and the index declined around 835 points from the day's high to hit a low of 75,175.27.

Broader Nifty of the NSE declined by 24.65 points or 0.11 per cent, to end at 22,932.45. The 50-issue barometer rose by 153.7 points or 0.66 per cent to hit a new lifetime high of 23,110.80 during the day. However, it tanked around 240 points at the fag-end due to selling in oil, energy and FMCG shares.

Index heavyweight Reliance Industries declined nearly 1 per cent, dragging the benchmark indices into the negative. Selling in FMCG giant ITC also eroded gains.

Equity benchmarks were on a record-breaking rally for the third straight day ahead of the results of Lok Sabha polls and a rally in global markets. The results of the ongoing general elections will be declared on June 4.

Sensex breached the historic

75,000-mark for the first time on April 9. It took 31 trading sessions for the benchmark to climb 1,000 points to reach the 76,000-mark on Monday. The BSE benchmark took 21 trading sessions to reach 75,000-mark on April 9 after hitting the 74,000-level on March 6.

From the Sensex pack, Wipro, NTPC, Sun Pharma, Mahindra & Mahindra, ITC and Reliance Industries were among the biggest laggards. IndusInd Bank, Axis Bank, Bajaj Finance, HDFC Bank, Larsen & Toubro and State Bank of India were among the major gainers.

"The bulls are facing stiff resistance at 23,000 levels as investors start booking profit at higher levels to avoid any knee-jerk reaction in the market ahead of the election result. Better earnings growth, the expectation of a revival in private capex, and a moderation in FIIs selling intensity are the key positive triggers in the market," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

"Nifty ended almost flat in a volatile session after hitting record highs in the early part of the session," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities.

Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd said that the tone was positive in the first half, but profit-taking in heavyweights in the second half erased all the gains. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge climbed 0.63 per cent while smallcap index dipped 0.09 per cent.

## NTPC appoints Akhilesh Singh as new head of Bongaigaon unit

**GUWAHATI, May 27:** State-run power major NTPC on Monday said it has appointed Akhilesh Singh as the Business Unit Head of its Bongaigaon plant in Assam. Singh, who was previously heading the company's 1,600-MW Lara unit in Chhattisgarh, has succeeded K C Muraliedharan, who has been relocated to NTPC Dadri as Head of Project, NTPC said in a release. The new Bongaigaon Head, who took charge on Monday, has rich exposure to working in NTPC's largest power stations at Rihand and Vindhyachal, where he played a pivotal role in overseeing op-

erational efficiency and excellence, it said.

"During the long association of over 30 years, Singh contributed a lot to achieving a greater height in the O&M Performance of various stations of NTPC. Singh joined NTPC as an Executive Trainee in 1993 after having a degree in Electrical Engineering from Bhagalpur University," the release said.

In his new capacity, Singh will be responsible for coordinating all activities at NTPC Bongaigaon in Assam which boasts a generating capacity of 750 MW, it added. (PTI)

## Gold, silver prices rebound on strong global cues amid escalating tensions in Middle East

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Gold and silver prices rebounded sharply on Monday after falling for three straight sessions, with the precious metal jumping ₹ 220 to ₹ 72,820 per 10 grams in the national capital, tracking a strong trend in the overseas market due to escalating tensions in the Middle East.

Gold had closed at ₹ 72,600 per 10 grams in the previous session on Friday, according to HDFC Securities. Silver prices also bounced ₹ 1,050 to ₹ 92,850 per kg. In the previous session, it had finished at ₹ 91,800 per kg.

"Spot gold prices (24 carats) in the Delhi markets are trading at ₹ 72,820 per 10 grams, up by ₹ 220 against the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst, Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,344 per ounce, up USD 9 from the previous close.

Gold resumed trading on a positive note, supported by soft US



dollar, and geopolitical tensions in the Middle East increased after Israel carried out airstrikes in Rafah, leading to an increase in safe-haven demand for the yellow metal, Gandhi said.

Additionally, silver also traded higher at USD 30.75 per ounce.

"Gold prices are stuck in a range, as the US and the UK mar-

kets are closed on Monday.

"However, volatility is expected to remain high as focus will be on inflation numbers from Germany, Eurozone, and the US due later in the week and could give some clues on the rate cuts by European Central Bank (ECB) and the US Federal Reserve," Pranav Mer, VP of Research (Commodity & Cur-

rency) at BlinkX and JM Financial Services, said.

Meanwhile, in the futures trade on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold bounced ₹ 462 to trade at ₹ 71,718 per 10 grams. The most-traded June contract of gold hit an intra-day high of ₹ 71,741 per 10 grams.

Further, silver contracts for July delivery were also trading higher by ₹ 1,527, or 1.69 per cent, to ₹ 92,075 per kg on the exchange.

According to market experts, gold prices recovered some of the losses from last week, rising slightly to USD 2,346.60 in Asian trading on Monday.

Traders will also take more cues from the first reading of US GDP for the first quarter on Thursday and the Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index data, due on Friday which will further provide more direction on the precious metal prices, experts said.

The stronger-than-expected data might boost the greenback and weigh on the gold prices. (PTI)

## LIC Q4 net profit rises 2 pc to ₹ 13,763 cr

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Insurance behemoth LIC on Monday posted a marginal 2 per cent increase in net profit at ₹ 13,763 crore in the fourth quarter ended March 2024 as the corporation made provisions for wage hike.

The insurer had earned a profit of ₹ 13,428 crore in the corresponding quarter a year earlier. The total income of the insurer during the reporting quarter rose to ₹ 2,50,923 crore from ₹ 2,00,185 crore in the same period of the preceding fiscal. LIC said in a regulatory filing. LIC's income from first-year premium also improved to ₹ 13,810 crore in the latest January-March quarter against ₹ 12,811 crore in the same period of preceding fiscal. The income from renewal premiums in the reporting period rose to ₹ 77,368 crore compared to ₹ 76,009 crore a year ago.

During the entire financial year ended March 2024, the insurer earned a profit of ₹ 40,676 crore as compared to ₹ 36,397 crore in the previous fiscal. The total premium income for year ended March 2024 was ₹ 4,75,070 crore as compared to ₹ 4,74,005 crore in the year ended March 2023. A total of 2,03,92,973 policies were sold in the individual segment in FY24 as compared to 2,04,28,937 policies sold previous fiscal. The board recommended a final dividend of ₹ 6 per share for 2023-24 subject to approval of shareholders, LIC Chairman Siddhartha Mohanty said.

Earlier, during the year an interim dividend of ₹ 4 was declared and paid to shareholders of the corporation. Therefore, he said, the total of interim and recommended final dividend aggregates to ₹ 10 per share. In terms of market share

measured by First Year Premium Income (FYPI) (as per IRDAI), LIC continues to be the market leader by market share in Indian life insurance business with overall market share of 58.87 per cent.

Commenting on financial numbers, Mohanty said, "We have more than doubled our share of non-par business within our individual business. Now we intend to focus our strategic interventions to maximize our market share across categories. At the same time, our sharp focus on various parameters which create superior value for all stakeholders shall continue, as demonstrated."

There are key initiatives related to distribution channel and digital transformation underway, he said, adding topline growth trajectory will be back in focus during the current financial year. (PTI)

Contd. from Page 1...

## Remal effect: Assam braces

The India Meteorological Department has warned of extremely heavy rainfall over Assam along with other northeastern states on Monday and Tuesday. A red alert for extremely heavy rainfall has been issued in Chirang, Goalpara, Baksa, Dima Hasao, Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj districts, and an orange alert for Dhubri, South Salmara, Bongaigaon, Bajali, Tamulpur, Barpeta, Nalbari, Morigaon, Nagaon, Hojai and West Karbi Anglong in Assam.

Squally winds of 40-50 kmph gusting to 60 kmph are likely over South Assam and Meghalaya on Monday, the weather office said. The ASDMA has ramped up preparations along with other departments, agencies and district administrations to face any eventuality arising out of heavy rainfall and severe winds due to 'Remal', the release said. NDRF teams have been deployed in Cachar, Bongaigaon and Dibrugarh, while personnel of Fire and Emergency Services are also on standby, officials said. The ASDMA has also recommended regulation of plying of boats if needed in the mainstream of Brahmaputra river on Monday and Tuesday. The Guwahati Municipal Corporation (GMC) has ensured the desilting of major river channels like Bharalu, Bahini, Basistha, Mora Bharalu and Lakhimijan along with other major drains.

Meanwhile, "anticipatory evacuation of vulnerable populations from landslide-prone areas in Guwahati, Kamrup, Dima Hasao, Cachar, Karimganj, Hailakandi, Karbi Anglong and West Karbi Anglong districts may also be considered", the ASDMA release said. (PTI)

## Kejriwal seeks extension of

in the jail and has not been able to regain even after his release and renewing his earlier lifestyle to the extent possible, it said. "In the meantime, recent test reports confirm that the Appellant has also developed an unusually high blood glucose level as well as high ketone levels in urine, which indicate that in addition to increased blood sugar level, the appellant may have also developed kidney related complications and kidney damage," it said. Referring to his recent health check up at his residence by a senior physician of a private hospital, the plea said the doctor took note of Kejriwal's health complications and increased risk indicators and prescribed a host of full body tests, which are necessary to be carried out before he surrenders. "It is important to note that unexplained weight loss which a person is not able to regain along with the other symptoms ..., can have a host of causes, including some potentially life threatening ones. "It is on account of this that a senior physician from Max Hospital upon a detailed clinical examination of the appellant at his home on May 25, 2024 has directed a host of tests including but not limited to tests such as whole body PET-CT to rule out any malignancies and Holter Monitor Test, where the appellant will be required to wear a Holter monitor for a few days while going about his daily activities to identify any irregularities in his heart functioning," the plea said. The PET-CT scan shows detailed pictures of organs and tissues. These tests are to be done in a particular sequence and would require about five-seven days, it said, adding "sudden and unexplained weight loss, coupled with high ketone levels could be indicative of kidney damage, serious cardiac ailments and even cancer".

Early detection of these ailments is essential for preventing further progress of the disease and associated life risk and Kejriwal needed to undergo these tests, otherwise his life is at "high risk", it said. While setting him free for campaigning in the remaining phases of the Lok Sabha elections after 50 days of custody in the case, the court on May 10 had barred him from visiting his office or the Delhi secretariat, and signing official files unless absolutely necessary for obtaining the lieutenant governor's approval. While imposing a strong of bail conditions on Kejriwal, the apex court had directed him to furnish bail bonds of ₹ 50,000 with one surety of the like amount to the satisfaction of the jail superintendent. A bench of justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta had rejected the argument of the Enforcement Directorate (ED) counsel that enlarging Kejriwal on interim bail to campaign in the elections will be without a precedent.

Later on May 17, the top court reserved its verdict on the main plea of Kejriwal seeking to declare his arrest as illegal. The Delhi High Court, on March 21, had refused to grant him protection from arrest on his petition challenging summonses issued to him. The ED arrested Kejriwal shortly after that. The ED, on October 30, had sent first summonses to Kejriwal in the money laundering case for appearance on November 2. Several summonses were also issued subsequently. The matter relates to the alleged corruption and money laundering in the formulation and execution of the Delhi government's now-scraped excise policy for 2021-22. (PTI)

## INDIA bloc leaders likely

September 1, where the opposition parties adopted resolutions to unitedly contest the Lok Sabha elections. The fourth meeting of the opposition bloc was held in Delhi on December 19. The next time the opposition leaders came together was in Delhi on March 31, when top leaders shared the stage at the 'Save Democracy' rally held against the arrests of Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal and former Jharkhand chief minister Hemant Soren. A similar 'Ugulan' rally was held in Ranchi on April 21. While the TMC, which is in power in West Bengal, does not have any seat-sharing deal with the Congress or any other INDIA bloc party in its home state, its candidate Laliteshpati Tripathi in Uttar Pradesh's Bhadohi has been supported by ally Samajwadi Party.

Meanwhile, the ruling alliance led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also claimed that it will form the government at the Centre for the third successive time after these elections. Twenty-eight opposition parties came together to form the INDIA bloc. However, some parties such as Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal later switched over to the NDA. (PTI)

## ₹14 cr public funds allegedly

disbelief at the extravagance, Kathar questioned the necessity of spending such a large sum for the enjoyment of a few individuals. "These people could have easily funded the trip themselves. Instead, they chose to dip into public funds, disregarding the pressing needs of the community," he remarked. Kathar further claimed that the trip undertaken by the chief executive member (CEM), executive members (EMs), and members of Autonomous Council (MACs) among others, occurred shortly after the parliamentary elections in the Diphu constituency.

Kathar also accused the KAAC of violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) by withdrawing funds during this period, further alleging that the tour yielded no tangible benefits for the region.

"The KAAC by violating the ongoing MCC has withdrawn an amount of ₹ 14 crore from P&RD and has used it for an enjoyment tour of Vietnam. The tour has benefited nothing. It was just an enjoyment by the CEM, EMs and MACs," he stated. In a scathing attack on Tuliram Ronghang, the CEM of KAAC, Kathar accused him of prioritising personal enjoyment over the welfare of the people. "While communities struggle with food shortages and homelessness in the aftermath of storms, it is appalling that public funds are squandered on frivolous trips," Kathar asserted, revealing that complaints have been lodged with the Election Commission of India (ECI).

The controversy extends beyond financial mismanagement, with Kathar highlighting systemic issues in the electoral process. He cited instances where indigenous voters faced significant hurdles, including long journeys to polling stations and unjust deletions from voter lists, in contravention of Election Commission guidelines.

## Karbi Anglong gears up

within the Karbi Anglong district. The DC also disclosed that approximately 5,500 postal ballots are slated for scrutiny. Providing statistical insights, the DEO revealed that the Karbi Anglong Parliamentary Constituency boasts a total of 9,01,032 electors, with 6,82,441 votes polled, translating to a notable poll percentage of 75.74%. Within the Karbi Anglong election district alone, the total electors amounted to 3,64,955, with 2,78,598 votes cast, registering a poll percentage of 76.31%.

## Aided by technology, new

"All these matters will now be online. The FIR, court diary, judgement will also be digitised. We have made forensic evidence compulsory in cases where there is a provision for imprisonment for a period of minimum seven years," he said. Asked about the preparation for rolling out the new laws, the home minister said it is going on full swing and training of officials is almost over. After its implementation, "one can get an order even from the Supreme Court within three years from the day of registering an FIR" under the new criminal laws, he said. The home minister said he had been working on the new criminal laws since 2019? after he took charge of the home ministry. "We have been working towards modernisation of courts and police stations. Everything is happening with the help of technology. Law is getting modernised through technology," he said. The three new laws were enacted in December 2023 and President Droupadi Murmu gave her assent on December 25. Meanwhile, officials said the government is also in the process of procuring 900 forensic vans to be stationed in all 850 police districts in the country so that forensic evidence could be collected quickly after any crime and videograph could be done on the crime scene. (PTI)

## BJP gov't will take

that is in between Pandian and his wife and only one T, which stands for Tamil Nadu." Neither the state cabinet nor any officer has the power in Odisha. Only two persons (Pandian and his wife) have all the powers, Sarma alleged. Alleging that Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik was being "held hostage" by Pandian, Sarma appealed to Patnaik to come out alone to get respect from people. (PTI)



## Students' body demanded government intervention to alleviate burden on common people AJYCP protests soaring prices of essential commodities across state

HT Correspondent

**MARGHERITA, May 27:** Under the instruction of Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) Central Committee on Monday, the AJYCP Tinsukia district committee staged a sit-in for three hours at North Margherita Rangamancha in protest against the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities such as grocery items, medicines, and fuel products.

More than 50 members of the Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuba Chatra Parishad Tinsukia district committee were present and shouted various slogans against the BJP-led government of Assam.

Kanchan Borah, the general secretary of Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) Tinsukia district committee, said that due to rampant price inflation of essential commodities, the general populace is suffering a lot, but despite this, the state government has not taken any concrete steps to reduce price inflation.

"Price inflation of grocery items, vegetables, medicines, petrol, diesel, LPG cylinders, school fees, and stationary items has increased rampantly. That's why we staged a sit-in at North Margherita Rangamancha, and we demand that chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma immediately take necessary steps so that the prices of essential commodities may become a little cheaper and the general populace can afford to buy," said Kanchan Borah.

A memorandum was submitted to the chief minister through the Margherita sub divisional officer (civil).

**Our Jorhat correspondent adds:** The Jorhat district unit of AJYCP, following the directive of the central committee of the students' body, staged a sit-in demonstration on Monday in front of the Jorhat district commissioner's office complex to protest against the soaring prices of fuel, LPG cylinders, and other essential commodities.

Holding placards, members of the students' body shouted slogans against the cen-



tral and state governments, highlighting the severe impact on common people due to the continuous steep rise in prices of LPG, fuel, and essential commodities.

They slammed the BJP-led governments at the Centre and in Assam, recalling that BJP leaders had previously protested against price rises during the UPA government's tenure by wearing garlands of onions, bringing LPG cylinders, and using bullock-carts.

They pointed out the irony that the same party (BJP), which has been in power for two successive terms at both the Centre and state, now seems indifferent to the issue of price hikes.

They alleged that the Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs department was inactive while people were struggling with the sharp increase in prices of essential commodities.

Pranabjyoti Saikia and Babu Dutta, president and general secretary of the AJYCP Jorhat district unit, respectively, led the protest program. Subsequently, the students' body submitted a memorandum to the chief minister through the Jorhat DC office, urging immediate attention to curb the price

hike of essentials.

**Our Nagaon correspondent adds:** Nagaon district body of Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuba Chatra Parishad (AJYCP) staged a sit-in protest against the unbelievable increase in prices of essential commodities, lifesaving medicine, as well as other petroleum products in front of the office of the district commissioner, Nagaon on Monday.

Hundreds of agitators from the district unit of the organisation participated in the stir and reverberated the air with various slogans against the government and sought immediate intervention of the state government to control the skyrocketing prices of essential goods and lifesaving medicines. During the agitation, the protesters of the youth organisation also criticised the government for being silent on the issues for too long.

Pragjyotish Bonia and Debasish Das, the district president and secretary of the organisation respectively, said the role of the state government in this regard is very pitiable and mentioned that it has apparently proved how the state government is responsible for the middle class as well as the poor people.

Following the strike, the agitators submitted a memorandum to the state chief minister through the district commissioner and urged to initiate measures to control the 'price hike' in the state as early as possible, as asserted in a press note here.

**Our Dibrugarh correspondent adds:** Members of the Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuba Parishad (AJYCP) staged a sit-in protest in Dibrugarh on Monday to voice their frustration and anger over the steep rise in the prices of essential commodities in the state. The sit-in demonstration was staged from 10 am to 1 pm along with similar protests in district headquarters across Assam.

Protesters from the AJYCP gathered in large numbers, raising slogans against the government for its failure in curbing the skyrocketing prices of essential commodities, including food grains, cooking oil, cooking gas, petrol, diesel, medicines, and vegetables.

Udayan Baruah, the president of AJYCP in Dibrugarh district, pointed accusing fingers at the state Food, Civil Supplies, and Consumer Affairs minister, Ranjeet Kumar Dass, for his inability to address the escalating prices. Baruah, along with the general secretary, Gauranga Gogoi, criticised the government's insensitivity toward the sufferings of the common people.

"We condemn the government's inaction in controlling the rising prices of essential commodities. The common people are bearing the brunt of this price hike, and it is high time the government takes immediate action to provide relief," Baruah exclaimed.

Gogoi also echoed the sentiment of the protesters, stating, "If the government fails to take suitable measures to control the price hike, we will intensify our agitation and hold massive demonstrations against the state government in the coming days."

At the end of the protest, the demonstrators dispatched a memorandum to chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma through the district commissioner.

## District admin braces for Cyclone Remal, issues precautionary measures

HT Correspondent

**HOJAI, May 27:** Hojai district administration is taking precautionary measures to ensure the safety of citizens as Cyclone Remal is expected to bring heavy winds and severe rainfall. An order was issued on Monday to prevent potential loss of life and property.

The National Bulletin no 14 (BOB/01/2024) has been issued for the cyclonic storm 'Remal', which developed over the east central Bay of Bengal. As Remal moves northwards, heavy winds and significant rainfall are expected in Hojai district and the entire state of Assam.

Recognising the serious nature of the situation, immediate measures are necessary to prevent potential loss of life and property. Therefore, Lachit Kumar Das, ACS, district commissioner, and chairman of DDMA Hojai, under the powers vested upon him by the

Disaster Management Act, 2005, has issued the following orders: All department and private boats/vessels operating ferry services within Hojai district are to be suspended from May 27, 2024, to May 28, 2024. This suspension excludes essential services, relief and rescue operations, and boats transporting construction materials and labourers; fishing activities in the river Kopli and Jamuna and its tributaries are prohibited during this period; prohibition of swimming in rivers or water bodies, and agricultural activities like ploughing, cattle grazing, etc., within Hojai district from May 27 to 28, 2024; Caution against touching power lines to avoid electrocution; advisement to avoid water logging areas; directive to take shelter during thunderstorm/lightning activities; in case of any emergency, citizens were advised to call 1077 (toll-free).

## New Look Academy celebrates academic excellence

HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, May 27:** Meritorious students were felicitated at New Look Academy, Sivasagar, in recognition of the first batch's outstanding performance in the HSSLC Examinations 2024, where they achieved a 100 percent pass rate. The event took place on Saturday in the presence of academicians Dr Arundhati Mahanta and Dr Ranjan Phukan.

Srimanta Borthakur, the principal of the academy, delivered the welcome speech and encouraged students to strive harder to bring honour to the state and the country. Dr Mahanta, in her address, remarked that the school's name has instilled hope among students and parents alike. Dr Ranjan Phukan expressed that the success of the first batch indicates a promising future for the institution.

## CITK hosts delegation from Nagaland University



HT Correspondent

**KOKRAJHAR, May 27:** A delegation team from Nagaland University visited the Central Institute of Technology Kokrajhar (CITK) on Monday to explore areas of mutual collaboration, as planned by the director of CIT Kokrajhar. The delegation team included Prof Y Sundarayya, head of the department of physics; Abhijit Sutradhar, deputy registrar of the academic and conference section; and Peter Kee from the public relations office. The delegation was warmly received by the deans of alumni and external relations, Dr Pranav and Bikramjit. The visitors were taken on a tour of various departments and interacted with all the deans, registrars, heads of departments (HoDs), faculty, and staff of CITK during a one-day departmental visit and interaction session.

During the visit, the delegation from Nagaland University presented a short video showcasing their institution, highlighting their academic activities and achievements. In return, the deans of CITK provided detailed briefings about their respective sections. The registrar of CITK highlighted the institute's journey, while the HoDs shared insights into their departmental activities, lab operations, and ongoing projects.

Dean of alumni and external relations, Pranav, and Bikramjit guided the delegation on a short campus tour, expressing gratitude for their visit.

Both institutions concluded the visit with a mutual agreement to sign memorandums of understanding (MoUs) to support each other and engage in collaborative academic and research activities in the future. The visit marked a significant step towards fostering a strong partnership between CITK and Nagaland University, aiming to enhance academic and research endeavors through shared resources and collaborative efforts.

## Dopani High School celebrates golden jubilee

HT Correspondent

**DEMOW, May 27:** Dopani High School in Demow recently celebrated its golden jubilee with a series of engaging events. Among them, an array of competitions including quiz, essay, and drawing, were held on May 25, 2024. The inauguration of these events was graced by Dr Birinchi Kumar Borah, principal of HCDG College, Nitaipukhuri. The essay competition, dedicated to the memory of the esteemed former teacher late Nilamoni Dutta, saw participation from class 9 and class 10 students, categorised into three groups. Simultaneously, the drawing competition, in collaboration with alumni from the 2007 batch, unfolded across three distinct categories. Additionally, paying tribute to the legacy of the late physical director, Akshay Borgohain, an All Assam Based Inter School Quiz Competition was the highlight of the event.

## ABSU leads protest rally against Dudhnoi incident



**HT Correspondent KOKRAJHAR, May 27:** On Monday, a significant protest rally surged through Dudhnoi in Goalpara, denouncing the heinous gang

rape of two minors and the subsequent murder of Hiranmoy Khakhlary, an innocent youth. Thousands of protesters and concerned citizens flooded the streets, brandish-

## Prominent educationist passes away

HT Correspondent

**MORIGAON, May 27:** Rajen Kumar Nath, 90, a prominent educationist, writer, poet, founder of various institutions, and retired principal of Charaibahi Higher Secondary School, passed away. Nath, who had been suffering from old age ailments for about a month and a half, passed away at his residence in Charaibahi. Late Nath was born in 1934. He was an English teacher who secured the fifth position in Assam and the first position in the erstwhile Nagaon district in the 1950 ME's Scholarship Examination.

Nath started writing poems and songs from classes seven and eight and composed his own songs. Nath was also elected as the general secretary of the Chhatra Ekta Sabha of Jaluguti Higher Secondary School. He passed the IS examination and joined the post of assistant teacher at Charaibahi ME School. He later graduated in English

and joined Charaibahi Higher Secondary School as an assistant teacher and retired from Charaibahi Higher Secondary School in 1996 as the principal. Nath was selected as a resource person in the education depart-

ment due to his special proficiency in English and became involved in teacher training. He was involved in various institutions in the area during his lifetime and established many institutions. He was the founding secretary of Charaibahi Central Library, Charaibahi Girls Middle English School, Charaibahi College, Charaibahi Girls Higher Secondary School, Charaibahi Sankardev Vidya Niketan, Charaibahi Literature Branch Nath also served as a fighter in the Assam movement. He was actively involved in the Charaibahi

Committee Bhaona. He is survived by his wife, two sons, two daughters, two daughters-in-law, grandchildren, and relatives.



ing banners and placards to decry these atrocious acts recently perpetrated in Dudhnoi, Goalpara district. Organised by the All Bodo Students Union (ABSU), the rally drew representatives from various organisations and locals united in their outcry against these crimes.

ABSU fervently demanded the highest penalty, death by hanging, for the accused rapists—Dhan Ali Talukdar, Bahar Ali, and Rahman Ali—and the murderers of Hiranmoy Khakhlary—Shekbar Ali and Permina Begum. The union insisted that the case be expedited through a Fast Track Court. Additionally, ABSU called for interim compensations of ₹ 20 lakh for Hiranmoy Khakhlary's family and ₹ 5 lakh each for the rape victims.

ABSU president, Dipen Boro, vehemently condemned the incident, urging stringent punishment for the perpetrators and vowing to sustain the protest until justice prevails.

## OBITUARY

The prominent socio-religious figure, Bhuvaneshwari Devi, from South Haibargaon, Nagaon, passed away at 1:09 pm on Monday after suffering a cardiac arrest at Health City Hospital in Guwahati. She was approximately 81 years old at the time of her death.

Bhuvaneshwari Devi was born in Petborha village of Nagaon and dedicated her life to religious and social work. She served as the president of the Women's Group of the 'South Haibargaon Nath Yogi Namghar'. She is survived by three sons, three daughters, many relatives, and countless admirers.

## OBITUARY



**Dr Ranjan Bharali,** the former vice principal of the historic Nowgong College (autonomous) and head of the department of Commerce, passed away at a hospital in Guwahati on Sunday night while undergoing treatment after sustaining severe injuries in a road mishap a few days ago.

Dr Bharali commenced his career as an assistant professor at Nowgong College in 1985 and served the college in various capacities. He retired from the college on January 31, 2021, holding the positions of vice principal and HoD, department of Commerce. Throughout his service, Dr Bharali also served as the president of Nowgong College Teachers' Council for two years. In addition to his teaching duties, he authored a dozen books on academic courses, particularly benefiting students in the commerce stream. He remained associated with several socio-cultural organisations in the small town until his demise.

He is survived by his wife, two children, and a host of relatives. His demise was mourned by various organisations and dignitaries in the town, who paid floral tributes to him.

Local MLA Rupak Sarma, former AGP minister Girindra Kr Baruah, teachers' groups from Nowgong College, ADP College, Khagarije College, Nowgong Girls' College, district units of All Assam Students' Union, and Asom Jatiyatbadi Yuba Chatra Parishad expressed their grief over his demise.

## Moran honours founder of Women's Sports School in Upper Assam



HT Correspondent

**SIVASAGAR, May 27:** Anjolee Chetia, the founder of the first Women's Sports School in Upper Assam in Moran, a sports pioneer, and a leading personality in the cultural field of Upper Assam, was felicitated by Moran

Milee Samaj on the occasion of her 68th birth anniversary on Sunday. The program, attended by a host of admirers of Anjolee Chetia, was presided over by noted journalist and editor of 'Asom Aditya', Kishore Manjit Bora. Bora, in his speech, lauded the organisers for their ef-

forts to recognise and felicitate a truly worthy daughter of the region.

As the chief guest at the felicitation program, former principal of Jorhat College, Dr Debabrat Sarma, described her as a woman of exceptional character and integrity, serving as an inspiration for the younger generation. Anjolee Chetia was the great-granddaughter of Tengai Mohan, the first compiler of the Assamese dictionary.

The felicitation volume 'Surjyasnata', edited by Rajumoni Chetia, was released by Padmashree Hemaprabha Chutia. Speakers who addressed the gathering included minister Jogen Mohan, Dr Girin Phukan (former professor, Dibrugarh University), journalists Jadunath Puri and Utpal Bora, literary figure Ila Borgohain, Nilakanta Gogoi, Bijoy Rajkonwar, Pitambor Tairai Gogoi (cultural worker), Mahendra Gogoi (retired DSP), Dharmakanta Hazarika, and Pradip Borua. Over thirty organisations felicitated Chetia with garlands and mementos. In her speech, Anjolee Chetia thanked the organisers and the attendees.

## Renowned business establishment launches experience center

HT Bureau

**GUWAHATI, May 27:** Riddhi-Siddhi Enterprises, one of Guwahati's pioneering business establishments, inaugurated its Experience Center at Fatasil Ambari Tinali, located in front of Ambari High School. Spread over one thousand square feet, this experience center was inaugurated by renowned social worker Sita-Girdharilal Jhawar, who lit the lamp in the presence of showroom head Sumit Jhawar, Lata Jhawar, Sudhir Jhawar, and other dignitaries.

Addressing the gathering, Sumit Jhawar highlighted his more than two decades of association with the B2B Distribution business. He emphasised that in response to the evolving needs and demands of valued customers, the experience center has been established in the heart of the city to serve the entire north east region.

Sumit Jhawar mentioned that the center offers a comprehensive



range of hardware-related items, including UPVC, aluminium, glass, wooden, WPC door frame and door, ACP sheets, silicone, all available under one roof in various sizes, varieties, and ranges. Additionally, food packaging containers and various types of adhesive tapes are also offered at wholesale prices, catering to establishments such as hotels, restaurants, sweet

shops, and fast-food centers. He further underscored Riddhi-Siddhi Enterprises' reputation for quality products and excellent services across the entire north-eastern region. With the opening of this experience center, he expressed confidence in their ability to enhance service delivery to the people of the north-eastern region, including Assam.



## QUOTE OF THE DAY

Every moment is a fresh beginning  
— TS Eliot

## Xi-Putin pact: A shift beyond Ukraine

The latest agreement between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin signals a significant shift in global geopolitics, aimed more at curbing US hegemony than resolving the Ukraine conflict. Contrary to the publicized intention of promoting a peaceful settlement in Ukraine, the pact lacks concrete steps or a timeline for resolution. Instead, it emphasizes strengthening China-Russia defence cooperation, poised to counter potential US-led NATO actions. Ukraine, ravaged by ongoing conflict, faces an uphill battle against Russia despite support from the US, UK, and other NATO allies. As the war drags on, the likelihood of Ukraine's surrender grows, especially without substantial on-ground military support. China's backing of Russia in the event of a direct NATO assault and Russia's support for China's ambitions in the Pacific, including Taiwan, highlights the broader strategic aims of the agreement. The biggest beneficiary of the Ukraine conflict thus far has been the US arms industry. Recently, the US Senate approved \$95 billion in aid, targeting Ukraine, Israel, and Taiwan. This aid package, predominantly allocated to Ukraine, underscores the US strategy of countering Russian and Chinese influences. As the US ramps up weapon supplies to Ukraine, the Xi-Putin alliance complicates the already volatile situation.

In their joint statement, Xi and Putin criticized the US for its Cold War mentality and bloc confrontation approach, accusing it of destabilizing global security. They condemned the seizure of foreign assets, directly referencing US-led initiatives to redirect profits from frozen Russian assets to aid Ukraine. The statement called for a political settlement of the Ukraine crisis, opposing prolonged conflict. However, achieving such a resolution requires negotiations, a step uncertain under current US policy. China's support is crucial for Russia as it intensifies its offensive in Ukraine. Xi's broader objectives include expanding China's trade and military influence, positioning Beijing as an equal partner to Moscow. China, now the top buyer of Russian oil and a major exporter to Russia, strengthens its economic ties amid the conflict. The new military alliance bolsters their combined military capabilities, presenting a formidable challenge to US dominance. For India, this Sino-Russian pact presents significant strategic concerns. India, a major importer of Russian defense equipment, faces increased complexity in its geopolitical landscape due to its border tensions with China. The burgeoning Beijing-Moscow military partnership disrupts India's strategic positioning, pushing it closer to Western alliances. As a key member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), India must navigate these shifting dynamics carefully.

The Quad, comprising India, Australia, Japan, and the US, focuses on Indo-Pacific security and cooperation. The Sino-Russian defense alliance forces India to balance its commitments between Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific, necessitating a recalibration of its diplomatic and strategic priorities. In essence, the Xi-Putin agreement is a calculated move to counter US influence globally. It strengthens their military partnership and aligns their strategic goals, particularly in response to US actions in Ukraine and Taiwan. For the US, this poses a significant challenge. India, caught in the crossfire of these geopolitical shifts, faces a delicate balancing act. Its longstanding ties with Russia, juxtaposed with growing tensions with China and partnerships in the Quad, require a nuanced approach to maintain its strategic autonomy and regional stability. The Xi-Putin pact underscores a new era of geopolitical realignments, with China and Russia presenting a united front against US hegemony.

## Election Commission is acting partially by ignoring hate speeches of PM



By: Harihar Swarup

“I am strict and I may be stern but I'm always fair and transparent. You get what you see”. This is one side. This was how T N Seshan, arguably, the Chief Election Commissioner who made the Election Commission of India an admired institution, used to describe himself. Then he would add “whilst I sit on this chair I have a job to do and I'll do it to the best of my ability. Wild horses can't stop me”. No wonder he was fondly called “Bulldog Seshan”. It was a moniker he revelled in.

Alas, the Commission of today behaves like a very different animal. It is more obedient to the centre than a watchdog, if you want to extend the analogy. It seems to have forgotten the need for fairness and transparency. It is no longer determined to do its job even in the teeth of fierce resistance. Instead it seeks the easy way out.

A month has lapsed since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Banswara speech-in fact, in seven days from now voting will be concluded—but the commission has barely acted in response to an accusation of the PM blatantly breaching the model code as well as Representation of people Act. No action has been taken against the Prime Minister for his repeated blatant hate speeches.

Unlike the case of K Chandrashekar Rao, A Raja, Supriya Shrinate and Randeep Surjee-

wala, the EC decided not to issue a notice directly to Modi. Instead, it wrote to BJP President J P Nadda on the flimsy ground that Modi is party's star campaigner. The notice did not mention the PM by name or designation.

Only the annexed documents did that. When the party failed to respond on the specific date, it readily agreed to extend by one week more. Even after receiving a response, the Commission is in no hurry to take a decision. This deliberate prevarication suggests it is playing for time.

Meanwhile, what has the PM done? On virtually a daily basis, he has been continue to demonize Muslims in Hindu eyes with repeated allegations that reservation intended for OBC, STs, and SCs will be snatched and given to them. Even Mangal Sutras and streedhan - and if you have two buffaloes, one of them - will be grabbed and given to Muslims.

Is this not compounding his original breach by careful and deliberate repetition? Is it not disregard for and defiance of the commission's model code of conduct?

All the commission seems to be able to do is sit back, listen and twiddle its thumbs. Why has it not taken tougher action? Why has it not moved to act least, the BJP for this continued, actually ceaseless defiance? Article 324 of the constitution, gives it all the powers it requires. (IPA Service)

# Rohingya's repression continues unabated in Myanmar

Latest reports from Myanmar, speak of new atrocities and crimes being committed in a concerted campaign of violence and destruction by Myanmar's military against the largely Muslim Rohingya people in northern Rakhine state

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights has reported of receiving frightening and disturbing reports from northern Rakhine state in Myanmar of the impacts of the conflict on civilian lives and property.

Liz Throssell, spokesperson for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, said on Friday 24 May in a briefing to journalists in Geneva, that “Some of the most serious allegations concern incidents of killing of Rohingya civilians and the burning of their property, has been received by the UN”, noting that tens of thousands of civilians have been displaced in recent days by fighting in Buthidaung and Maungdaw townships. She said that the information gathered in testimony from victims, eyewitnesses, satellite images, and online video and pictures over the last week indicate, “Buthidaung town has been largely burned.”

“We have received information indicating that the burning started on May 17, two days after the military had retreated from the town and the Arakan Army claimed to have taken full control,” she said.

Speaking in Bangkok, James Rodehaver, head of Myanmar Team, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, said his team had spoken to many sources on the ground and reviewed numerous materials, many of which “were deemed to be credible.”

“Our offices are corroborating information further, particularly in establishing who were the perpetrators of the burning. One survivor described seeing dozens of

dead bodies as he fled the town. Another survivor said that he was among a group of displaced persons numbering in the tens of thousands, who attempted to move outside of the town to safety but were blocked by the Arakan Army.”

Rodehaver said, pointing out that the Arakan Army had abused survivors and extorted money from them as they fled the town.

**Earlier history**  
The latest fighting comes in the context of a civil war in Myanmar that began after the army ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi, leading to an armed resistance opposing military rule.

The pro-democracy fighters are allied with several of the ethnic minority groups that have been fighting for greater autonomy for decades, and have well-trained military forces.

The Arakan Army is an armed ethnic group fighting as part of an alliance against the Myanmar military. The AA says it is fighting for more autonomy for the ethnic Rakhine population in the state, which is also home to an esti-

ated 600,000 members of the persecuted Rohingya Muslim minority, who have chosen to remain in the country. The Arakan Army had a loose cease-fire with the military government until last October, when it joined with two other ethnic armed groups to capture territory in northeastern Myanmar.

The Rohingya were the targets of a brutal counterinsurgency campaign incorporating rape and murder that saw an estimated 740,000 flee to neighbouring Bangladesh as their villages were burned down by government troops in 2017.

Rohingya have lived in Myanmar for generations, but they are widely regarded by many in the country's Buddhist majority, including members of the Rakhine minority, as having illegally migrated from Bangladesh. The Rohingya face a great amount of prejudice and are generally denied citizenship and other basic rights.

**Latest incidents**  
In the weeks leading up to the burning of Buthidaung, the Myanmar team of the UN human

rights offices has documented renewed attacks on Rohingya civilians by both the Arakan Army and by the military in northern Rakhine state, including many by aerial strikes and drones.

He said his office also has received reports of shooting at unarmed fleeing villagers, multiple disappearances and burnings of homes, and has confirmed four cases of beheadings.

Rodehaver said the military has been actively targeting the Rohingya for years and has “actively enforced draconian and discriminatory restrictions affecting all aspects of their lives.”

“It is one of the reasons why the Rohingya, whenever they were asked to leave Buthidaung and other villages, have been very reluctant to move because they have needed special permission to move outside of their township of residence. They also have nowhere else to go.

“They, of course, have learned very hard lessons in 2017, knowing that whenever movement starts, it usually ends with them leaving their homes, never to see them again,” he said.

The Myanmar junta, which has been at war with its people for decades, recently has suffered many defeats. One consequence is young men have been conscripted from the Rohingya to fight its battles, by promising them many benefits, such as more food rations for their families and a promise of citizenship. Rodehaver calls that an insidious ploy by military leaders.

Tom Andrews, the UN special rapporteur on the human rights situation in Myanmar, warned Thursday of “ominous signs of

another Rohingya bloodbath in Rakhine state” if the international community were to continue to turn a blind eye and fail to take action to save the lives of thousands of Rohingya.

“Once again, the world seems to be failing a desperate people in their hour of peril, while a hate-driven unnatural disaster unfolds in real time in Myanmar's Rakhine state,” he said.

Mirroring that assessment, UN human rights chief Volker Turk is calling for “an immediate end to the violence, and for all civilians to be protected without any distinction based on identity. “Prompt and unhindered humanitarian relief must be allowed to flow, and all parties must comply fully and unconditionally with international law,” he said.

More than a million Rohingya have taken shelter in neighbouring Bangladesh after fleeing Rakhine, including hundreds of thousands in 2017 during an earlier crackdown by the military that is now the subject of a United Nations genocide court case.

What perplexes one here is the ominous silence of the so-called Muslim states against the Myanmar's junta, for targeting the Rohingyas.

Even the Muslim organisations like the OIC have not moved beyond passing resolutions against the massacre of Rohingyas, and have refrained from taking any firm action at the ground level to force the junta to put a stop to these inhuman massacres. The same applies to the plight of Uyghur Muslims in China. (The author is a Delhi-based senior political and international affairs commentator)

## Strong internal security is Modi's big success

By: Prof. Mahesh Chand Gupta

Once upon a time, there was an atmosphere of insecurity and terror in every part of the country. Terrorist attacks were common in the country. Whenever the terrorists wanted, they would cross the border and kill innocent people in different cities of the country. Bombings had become an everyday occurrence. While Pakistan continued firing on the borders, it also continued to fuel terrorism within our country.

Although there was no corner of the country where terrorists did not wreak havoc, but Mumbai was the favorite target of terrorists. After the demolition of Babri Masjid, the entire Mumbai was shaken by bomb blasts on 12 March 1993. The entire world was stunned by the attack on Mumbai by Kasab and his associates on 26 November 2008.

Who can forget the death of 209 people due to the blast in local trains on July 11, 2006? The killing of 10 people when a bomb exploded in a train in Mulund, Mumbai on March 14, 2003, and the killing of 50 people when two bombs kept in cars exploded near Zaveri Bazaar and Gateway of India on August 25, 2003, haunt us till today.

Before the Modi government, the country's capital Delhi was always the target of terrorists. The attack on Parliament on 13 December 2001 was an attack on the sovereignty of the country. On 29 October 2005, a day before Diwali, terrorists carried out three blasts in New Delhi, killing more than 70 people and injuring at least 250 others. I have been living in Delhi for the last 55 years. While I have seen the peace of Delhi, unfortunately I have also had to witness the turbulent days.

Delhi has faced countless terrorist attacks in the last four decades. The daily shaking of Delhi by bomb blasts still shakes us. Why only Delhi and Mumbai, the nefarious designs of terrorists continued to succeed in big cities of all the states of the country including Jaipur, Ajmer, Male-

gaon, Srinagar, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, Rampur, Hyderabad, Coimbatore, Varanasi.

It is unfortunate that whenever terrorist attacks took place in the country, the reaction of our governments was always limited to “strong condemnation” but after the formation of Modi government in 2014, extensive work started on the policy of killing terrorists on the border itself. The work of the terrorists who had entered India also started being completed.

Although the frightened terrorists had the audacity to attack Pulwama and Uri in Kashmir and Pathankot airbase in Punjab, but the way the Modi government killed the terrorists by entering Pakistan, it demoralized the terrorists and their patron Pakistan.

Obviously, as per the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Central Government has been committed to ensuring the nation's border and internal security by strengthening all aspects. Since the formation of Modi government in 2014, India has not had to face major terrorist attacks.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah's claim is absolutely correct that under the leadership of Modi, the internal security situation of the country has strengthened and there has been success in completely controlling terrorism in Kashmir. There has been a lot of change in the internal security situation of the country during the Modi era.

In the last ten years, the strategic power of the country has increased manifold. The borders have become more secure than before. Our forces are more fully equipped with defense equipment than before and are ready for war in every way and at all times.

The morale of our forces is very high. The process of reforms in the defense sector started by the Modi government is showing better results.

After the removal of Article 370, terrorism has been completely controlled in Kashmir and the number of deaths and other violent incidents have declined by 72 per-

cent. Violent incidents have also decreased by 65 percent in the North-East region. We are seeing a huge change in the situation in Naxal affected areas also.

Modi government has been completely serious towards national security. The National Security Strategy Conference held in New Delhi last year under the chairmanship of Home Minister Amit Shah has been an important link in fulfilling the vision of Prime Minister Modi. This topic has been discussed extensively in this conference so that better security can be ensured in every aspect of the country. After this, work is being done to provide an infallible shield of security everywhere, from village to district, from district to state and from state to country's borders.

Whenever Modi government has raised its voice against the enemies of the country, Congress and all the opposition parties have criticized it. Many times the opposition parties have been seen taking Pakistan's side on sensitive issues related to national security, but the Modi government is working considering the nation and its people as supreme. The Modi government has been successful in creating such an impenetrable structure on the country's borders and within the country, due to which every citizen is feeling safe.

Before 2014, Delhiites like me, who have seen 70 years of life, were afraid of going to the airport, railway station and bus terminal. People's fear increased further after hearing the announcement being made that do not touch any unclaimed object as it could be a bomb. But now the situation has changed.

Every citizen, not only in Delhi but in every city of the country, leaves home feeling fearless and confident and also returns home safely in the evening. Now we are not afraid of any terrorist. Due to secure borders and internal security, the country is moving rapidly on the path of progress. If Modi is there then it is possible. (The author is a well-known educationist. He has been professor in Delhi University for 44 years)

## ICC's decision on arrest warrant against Netanyahu exposes double standard of West

By: Tajul Islam

The International Criminal Court (ICC) and its chief prosecutor Karim Khan, a Pakistani-British member of Ahmadiyya community, with deep-rooted connections with Buckingham Palace and UK's intelligence establishments are hitting headlines in international media in the recent days. Criticizing ICC, in a recent statement on his ‘X’ handle, John Bolton, the former National Security Advisor to President Donald Trump, expressed his anger and strong criticism at ICC for its attempts of issuing an arrest warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and members of Hamas.

Ambassador Bolton denounced the ICC's actions as ‘illegitimate’, particularly in the context of an ongoing war. He urged the United States to take decisive measures, both through Congress and the White House, to condemn the ICC and impose sanctions in support of Israel.

President Joe Biden echoed Bolton's sentiments, labelling the ICC's attempt to arrest Netanyahu as ‘outrageous’. A group of Republican senators, led by Senator Tom Cotton, also voiced their disapproval, warning ICC chief prosecutor Karim Khan against pursuing arrest warrants for Israeli officials in connection with the Gaza conflict. These statements and actions highlight a clear pattern of support for Israel while simultaneously questioning the legitimacy and motivations of the ICC.

While some people may agree with Bolton, it is hard to overlook the apparent double standards at play. When the ICC issued an arrest warrant against Russian President Vladimir Putin, there was widespread celebration among US policymakers and their European allies. Putin was

accused of crimes related to his actions in Ukraine, which were seen as efforts to protect Russian sovereignty. Yet, these same leaders are now condemning the ICC for targeting Netanyahu. This inconsistency in reactions raises significant questions about the principles and motivations guiding these leaders.

The hypocrisy becomes even more apparent when considering the actions of various American presidents. The United States has a long history of military interventions in countries like Libya and Iraq, often resulting in significant human rights violations. Despite these actions, the ICC has largely remained silent. This silence raises questions about the ICC's impartiality and the true motivations behind its actions. Is the ICC selectively targeting certain leaders while ignoring the transgressions of others, especially those from powerful nations like the United States?

The current push to issue warrants against Netanyahu and leaders of Hamas originates from Karim Khan, the ICC's chief prosecutor. Khan, a Pakistani-born British lawyer and member of the Ahmadiyya community, has faced accusations of bias. Some view him as an anti-Semite, while others in Israel saw his election as a positive development, considering him “pragmatic.” However, pro-Palestinian media have accused him of favouring Israel and actively seeking to convict Hamas. This mixed perception of Khan further complicates the narrative and highlights the complex dynamics at play within the ICC.

The ICC itself has a troubled history, marred by scandals and controversies. In 2015, a significant scandal involving the court came to light. An investigation by the European Investigative Collaboration

(EIC) revealed questionable practices and the dubious morality of Luis Moreno Ocampo, the ICC's first prosecutor. These findings severely undermined the ICC's credibility and highlighted the political games that often surround international justice. The former chief prosecutor of ICC, Fatou Bensouda, also faced controversy. She has been mired in scandal. Accusations against ICC judges have further damaged the court's reputation, with reports highlighting issues with their morality, integrity, and independence. These controversies have cast a long shadow over the ICC's ability to function as a fair and impartial institution.

In September 2020, the US government took a decisive step by imposing sanctions on Bensouda and another senior ICC official, Phakiso Mochochoko. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo announced visa restrictions for individuals involved in the ICC's efforts to investigate US personnel. This move sent a clear message of the US's disapproval of the ICC's actions and highlighted the tension between the court and powerful nations. German broadcaster Deutsche Welle has described Karim Khan as a controversial figure. The Russian Foreign Ministry has also criticized the ICC, arguing that its actions violate international law. According to the ministry, the ICC's issuance of warrants against officials from non-party states to the Rome Statute, like Russia, is unlawful. This criticism underscores the complex legal and political challenges the ICC faces in executing its mandate. The Russian Foreign Ministry further stated that the ICC has deviated from its original objectives and principles of international law. This deviation, along with procedural shortcomings and political factors, has led to a loss of legitimacy and

authority in the eyes of many in the international community.

The totality of violations of international law committed by the ICC and its Prosecutor suggests a persistent and probably irreversible loss of credibility.

In another development, the US Department of State recently designated former Bangladeshi army official General Aziz Ahmed for “significant corruption”. The designation cited Ahmed's interference in public processes and involvement in helping his brother evade accountability for criminal activity in Bangladesh. Ahmed was also accused of accepting bribes and improperly awarding military contracts for personal gain. This designation has further complicated the narrative of international justice and the role of powerful nations in shaping it. An Al Jazeera journalist claimed on Facebook post that this US action was a result of an investigative report by the network. The report alleged that Bangladesh had purchased Israeli spyware, although it provided no credible evidence of corruption or money laundering by General Ahmed. Bangladesh authorities have denied purchasing surveillance equipment from Israel, raising further questions about the validity of Al Jazeera's claims.

The US sanctions against General Aziz Ahmed raises significant questions. If the sanctions are related to the purchase of Israeli surveillance equipment, why would the US, an ally of Israel, impose such measures? If not, why is Al Jazeera linking the sanctions to its investigative report? Al Jazeera's hostility towards Israel and its allies is well-known, and its claims seem misleading and unfounded. This situation highlights the complex interplay of media, international politics, and justice. (IPA Service)



# Family member in distress or an AI voice clone?

## The rise of a disturbing new cyber crime scam

By: Zova Hussain

Vrinda, a resident of Noida, was jolted by a frantic afternoon call from her son, or so it appeared. The voice, trembling with urgency, pleaded for a swift transfer of ₹ 60,000 through the Unified Payments Interface, or UPI, claiming he was under threat and urgently needed money.

The urgency in the voice and a distant command in the background painted a vivid picture of the crisis. Yet, something felt amiss when the voice called her "mummy" instead of the usual "mom". Her concern deepened when she heard what sounded like her sobbing child on the phone, making the situation seem alarmingly real.

Driven by fear, she transferred the money, only to discover later that it was indeed a scam. Her son was never on the phone; their voice had been convincingly cloned using sophisticated software.

In recent weeks, the Delhi-National Capital Region has seen a rise in such cases of voice cloning fraud, highlighting a disturbing trend in cyber-crime.

### AI voice clone scams

The use of Artificial Intelligence to clone voices for scams is increasing, with cybercriminals in India leveraging this technology for extortion. In Delhi alone, cybercrime cases surged to 685 in 2022, up from 345 in 2021 and 166 in 2020, according to data from the National Crime Records Bureau.

Many Indians are found to be particularly susceptible to scams of this nature, with a McAfee survey revealing that 66% of respondents from India would likely react to voice or phone calls seeking urgent financial help, particularly if the caller seemed to be a close relative like a parent (46%), spouse (34%), or child (12%).

The survey highlighted that the

most convincing pretexts used by scammers included being robbed (70%), involved in a car crash (69%), losing a phone or wallet (65%), or requiring funds during overseas travel (62%). The report also highlighted that 86% of Indians tend to share their voice data online or through voice messages at least once a week, enhancing the effectiveness of these tools.

This new wave of cybercrimes causes both psychological and financial damage. According to a Future Crime Research Foundation report, online financial fraud accounted for a staggering 77.41% of all cybercrime cases reported from January 2020 to June 2023.

A study highlighted that nearly 50% of the cybercrime cases reported were linked to UPI and internet banking, indicating the high vulnerability of these digital transaction methods to fraudulent activities.

Explaining the deceptive strategies employed by scammers, Prateek Waghre, Executive Director at the Internet Freedom Foundation, said, "Although these cloning tools have their limitations, scammers compensate by instilling a sense of urgency to overshadow these imperfections."

To a large extent, the entire cyber-crime scene hasn't been well mapped out in India. Voice cloning scams can target individuals in new ways, not just as an unknown third party pretending to be a government agent. For example, now, individuals might receive calls from voices resembling those of their parents, bosses, children, or friends, asking for money or information. This complexity makes detection particularly challenging."

### How are voice clones made?

Voice cloning technology has advanced to the point where it only needs a few seconds of someone's voice to accurately replicate it. According to McAfee, even those with minimal experience can use this tech-



nology to create a voice clone that matches the original voice with about 85% accuracy.

Romit Barua, Machine Learning Engineer and Researcher from UC Berkeley explains that voice cloning involves leveraging advancements in audio signal processing and neural network technologies to replicate a person's voice.

There are two particularly relevant forms of voice cloning, Text-To-Speech (TTS) and Voice Conversion. Text-To-Speech is a technology that converts written text into spoken words using synthetic voice. Voice conversion, on the other hand, changes the characteristics of a voice in existing audio to sound like another person while preserving the original speech content.

"Voice cloning involves using technology to analyse a short recording of someone's voice and then using that analysis to generate new speech that sounds like the original speaker. This process leverages computer algorithms to capture the unique characteristics of the voice, such as tone, pitch, and rhythm."

Once the system understands these elements, it can replicate them to create new speech content, making it sound as though the original person is saying something entirely new. It's

akin to creating a digital voice twin that can speak on behalf of the original person", explained Barua.

Once a scammer finds an audio clip of an individual, they can simply use an online service capable of mimicking that voice with high accuracy, though some nuances may be missed.

Many such platforms exist, including Murf, Resemble, and Speechify, which typically offer subscriptions ranging from \$15 for basic access to \$100 for advanced features, along with a trial period at no cost.

### Common patterns and tactics

Family Member in Crisis Scam: One prevalent use of voice cloning in scams is to trick people into believing that someone close to them is in immediate danger or distress, urgently needing financial assistance. By mimicking the voice of someone close to the victim, scammers create believable scenarios of emergencies like accidents or legal issues. The emotional turmoil and supposed urgency impair the victim's clarity of thought. This often prompts hasty actions without verifying the situation's authenticity.

Kidnapping Scams: Voice cloning technology has given a new edge to kidnapping scams, allowing criminals to mimic the voice of a supposed hostage, often a family member, to extort money or coerce victims into re-

vealing sensitive information. The convincing nature of the cloned voice can instil enough fear and urgency to make people comply with the scammer's demands, thus fueling such fraudulent schemes.

"The scenarios we've seen reported share common elements with traditional scams, such as urgent demands that put the recipient in a difficult situation. The key difference now lies in the delivery method," Waghre noted.

Waghre continued, highlighting another critical aspect, "A significant concern is how scammers obtain detailed personal information, such as the victim's relationships and the voices of their close contacts. In some cases, the voice may not be clear, sounding close enough to be convincing, while in others, victims report the voice sounding exactly like their relative or friend, raising questions about how scammers access such detailed personal information to create these convincing voice clones."

Adding to this concern, Waghre also shed light on a broader issue within the digital landscape – cybersecurity attacks that exploit human psychology, known as social engineering. These attacks are particularly insidious because they manipulate individuals into voluntarily surrendering confidential data.

"Scammers are becoming adept at understanding human behaviour and leveraging emotional triggers such as fear, urgency, or empathy to deceive their targets into sharing personal or financial information," he explained.

This method of exploitation underscores the importance of not just technological safeguards, but also heightened awareness and education about these psychological tactics among internet users. By staying informed about the common signs of such manipulative strategies, people can better protect themselves from inadvertently becoming victims of cyber fraud.

### Protective strategies

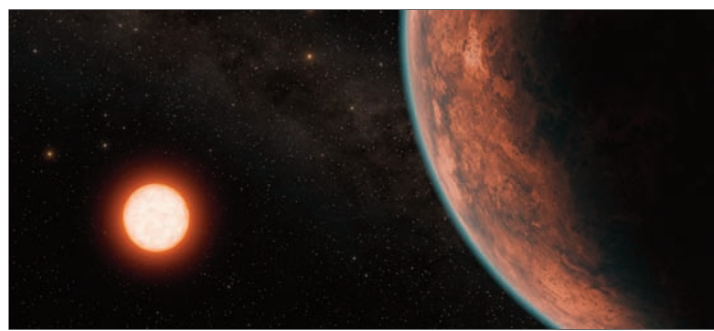
Verification is the key: When faced with unexpected requests, particularly those involving urgent financial transactions or sensitive information, it's crucial to verify the authenticity of the communication through another channel. "For example, if the caller appears to be your father, consider calling him back on his known number to confirm. While this may seem straightforward in theory, it can be admittedly challenging in practice, particularly during high-pressure situations where scammers manipulate emotions. You may not immediately think to request the caller to hang up while you verify their identity," suggested Waghre.

Hence, another crucial point arises. Stay calm and content: "Scammers often rely on inducing panic and emotional distress to cloud judgment and prompt immediate action," explains Barua. If you receive a call claiming a loved one is in crisis, try to remain calm and composed. Take a moment to gather pertinent details, pose probing inquiries, and firmly request alternate methods of verifying the caller's identity.

Enable the caller ID: Make sure to activate the caller ID feature on your smartphone at all times. This feature provides notifications about incoming calls, including the caller's identity and location. Moreover, it can also distinguish between calls from telemarketers and potential scammers.

Establish code words: Another recommendation from Waghre is to create code words within your family. These unique phrases can be used to verify the caller's identity, providing additional security against scams. "While these measures might seem like something out of a spy film, they are among the few strategies individuals have to counter such sophisticated scams, recognising the difficulty of dealing with them at the individual level," emphasises Waghre. (Courtesy: Scroll.in)

## Earth-sized exoplanet with potential for life discovered 40 light-years away



By: Rohini Krishnamurthy

Astronomers have discovered a potentially habitable exoplanet about 40 light-years away from Earth - one of the closest ones so far. The exciting discovery of Gliese 12 b was detailed in a new study published in journal Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society.

According to the study, the exoplanet's average surface temperature is 42 degrees Celsius, which is lower than the majority of the 5,000 or so exoplanets discovered thus far. Its size is comparable to Venus and is slightly smaller than Earth.

Gliese 12 b, however, is warmer than the Earth's average surface temperature of 15°C. Still, the researchers argue for more investigation of the exoplanet, including its atmosphere, which is essential for habitable conditions.

"We have found the nearest, transiting, temperate, Earth-size world located to date," said Masayuki Kuzuhara, a project assistant professor at the Astrobiology Center in Tokyo, who co-led a research team with Akihiko Fukui, a project assistant professor at the University of Tokyo, said in a statement.

"Investigating Earth-sized planets is important as we continue forwards to try and infer the number of true-Earth analogues, to cement how we understand our own place in the Universe," Larissa Palethorpe, a PhD student from the University of Edinburgh, told Down To Earth.

National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite (TESS) had earlier identified Gliese 12 b as a possible planet candidate.

The team used observations from TESS and the European Space Agency's CHaracterising Exoplanet Satellite or CHEOPS to validate Gliese 12 b.

The scientists discovered that Gliese 12 b orbits Gliese 12, a M dwarf star (a type of low-mass star), every 12.8 days.

This star has seven planets orbiting it, all of which are roughly the size of Earth and are most likely rocky.

Of these planets, three fall within the habitable zone. The habitable zone is the distance from a star at which liquid water can exist on the surfaces of planets orbiting it.

Furthermore, the star is metal-poor, which suggests that it may have weaker magnetic fields and more volcanism than Earth. Because the host star has low magnetic activity, the researchers believe that Gliese 12 b may have an atmosphere.

There's a possibility the exoplanet could have an atmosphere similar to Earth, but it could be a different type too, according to the team.

Further analysis could also reveal if Gliese 12 b is habitable. "We tend to define habitability in terms of liquid water, rather than where humanity would be able to maintain life. So while this temperature would be a bit on the hot side for humans to live comfortably, it doesn't necessarily mean other forms of life wouldn't be able to thrive in these conditions," Palethorpe explained.

It could also shed light on the evolution of Earth and Venus and why they appear so different.

Earth retained its water, whereas Venus' runaway greenhouse effect caused it to escape. Researchers might be able to spot signatures of whether the exoplanet is witnessing a runaway greenhouse effect. If they find no water in the future, it could indicate that such a process has already occurred, like on Venus.

Gliese 12 b, according to the paper, is a potential target for NASA's James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) as it can detect atmospheric features of planets.

The team hasn't currently submitted a JWST proposal for this target yet. For now, they are trying to calculate its mass, bulk density, and radius estimates to understand the exoplanet's internal structure. (Courtesy: Down To Earth)

## What is 'middle' about the 'middle class'?

By: Deepanshu Mohan

Renowned film actor Manoj Bajpayee, in a recent interview, spoke at length about how he lives and maintains a 'middle class life' despite having refined tastes and a love for champagne.

In the same interview, the actor said that he deliberately bought himself a small car without any fancy features because he couldn't teach himself how to operate his other vehicle, which is expensive and fully equipped. He further added that there is no limit to human ambition and one's desire to accumulate more wealth than one needs.

The self-defined perception of maintaining a 'comfortable' and 'dignified' life, sans luxury-lifestyle pursuits, with restrained human ambition (of accumulating more), is identified with a 'middle class' thinking that Bajpayee seeks to define here (more so for himself).

In the economic context, the same group (what one loosely calls the middle class) has been defined by scholars like Birdsall, Graham, and Pettinato (2000) as the "backbone of both the market economy and of democracy in most advanced societies" in the face of ever-expanding globalisation.

Of course, there is nothing new about this undistilled faith attributed to the need for and creation of a middle class for a capital-oriented market economy to thrive.

In developmental thinking and academic discourse, there is a long line of theorising around the criticality of the middle class (its political, social, and economic importance) going back, at least, to Max Weber (1905).

At least three distinct arguments are traditionally made, echoed in a 2008 study by Nobel Laureates Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo.

In the first set of arguments, new entrepreneurs armed with the capacity and tolerance for delayed gratification emerge from the middle class and create employment and growth in productivity for the rest of society (for a formalisation of this argument, see Acemoglu and Zilibotti, 1997).

In a second, perhaps more conventional theoretical view, the middle class is primarily a source of vital inputs for the entrepreneurial class: it is their "middle class values" and their emphasis on the accumulation of human capital and savings that make them cen-

tral to the process of capitalist accumulation (for example, Doepke and Zilibotti, 2005, 2007).

The third view, a staple of the business press, emphasises the middle class consumer as someone who is willing to pay a little extra for quality.

In the Indian scenario, one is also made to ask a larger question: Who is the middle class? And what is 'middle' about this identified middle class?

In a country where levels of income, wealth, and consumption inequality are perhaps at their worst historical level (see a recent 2024 study on inequality levels in India by Bharti, Piketty et al), and is currently one of the worst in the context of growing developing economies, the 'middle class' category—and its definition itself—remains quite disputed and stratified. There is an upper middle class, a middle middle class, and lower middle class, each of which has its own unique pattern of income, consumption levels, and socio-economic preferences.

But, there is more to this debate.

### Identifying the 'middle class'

There is a significant amount of nuanced academic discussion—at least in the development studies and economics literature—on 'who' can be defined as 'middle class'.

Duflo and Banerjee, in their 2008 paper, attempted to look into the 'middle class' question (in the context of India and 12 other developing countries) and what it means in the context of the income-consumption levels of populations living in low- and middle-income developing countries (from an internationally comparable and measurable perspective).

Household surveys and (micro-level) consumption data help provide good estimates. Even though the quality of data on income, wealth, and consumption (in the Indian context) is not of the best (most frequent) quality, a lot—based on what's available—can still be said about our question.

In their study's data on 13 studied countries (including India), except for the rural parts, those living on \$2 to \$4 per day (on a purchasing parity basis) were roughly between 23-40 percent of the overall population, i.e., composed of those between the 20th and 80th percentiles of consumption.

Duflo and Banerjee felt it reasonable (more than 15 years ago), according to an Easterly (2001) estimate, to define this group (those living in the \$2-\$4 per day category) as the 'middle class'. The \$6-\$10 group is much smaller in most countries (i.e., those who are above the 90th percentile of income in India).

Other definitions of the middle class provide similar results. For example, Birdsall, Graham, and Pettinato (2000) define the 'middle class' as those between 75 percent and 125 percent of median per capita income.

By this category too, the \$2-\$4 category fits their scale to represent the middle class (including for countries like Mexico and Peru).

In the current context, when one accommodates for inflation and the average rise of the standard of living, these lines (and ranges) would definitely deviate from their previously calculated estimates (similar to my earlier discussion on the nature of 'The Great Poverty Debate' afflicting India's socio-economic policy landscape).

### The 'middle class' consumer

Asked about his relationship with money, Manoj Bajpayee, in the same interview, said, "You need to have enough money for medical expenses and for your children's education. You need to be able to live a comfortable, dignified life, where you don't have to borrow money from anybody. That's it."

This statement, more reflectively, helps us (then) ask another critical question: Who can be called a middle class consumer based on their eating, food consumption, and other preferences?

Almost 120 years ago, Ernst Engel (1895) argued that the share of our household budget spent on food (and other inelastic/necessary items spending) falls with increases in the standard of living.

In rural Guatemala, for example, the share of the budget spent on food falls from 65 percent among the extremely poor on less than \$1 per day to 13.5 percent among those with daily per capita expenditures between \$6 and \$10.

As incomes rise, some of the resources (considered inelastic/necessary) are freed up by the lower share of income going towards them (on categories like food) and may go towards other overheads like entertainment.

The share of expenditure devoted to entertainment rises

with income, according to Duflo and Banerjee (2008), increasing from next to zero among the extremely poor to between one percent and five percent among those with daily per capita expenditures between \$6 and \$10, both in rural and urban areas.

The increase, according to the authors, is about half as much among those with daily per capita expenditures between \$2 and \$4. The share of income spent on festivals increases with the standard of living as well.

Similarly, more recent consumption data helps us ascertain the consumption preferences (and allocative importance in spending) assigned to areas like education, healthcare, and housing (including rental costs) by rural-urban households, and these patterns (among different income groups) have changed over time.

### Middle class people are neither 'poor' nor 'rich' but have 'good' jobs

Notwithstanding the inequalities in income-wealth accumulation that persist (and continue) to grow across households and groups in India, still, from the Banerjee-Duflo study, it seems clear that the middle class pursues what is conventionally known as a better "quality of life" (they are not poor and realise their limits to not being—or capable of being—rich either); with better health care for the family and more expensive education for the children, as well as more and better housing, more expensive eatables, and more entertainment, tobacco, and alcohol.

Despite the middle class's reputation for thrift, some "frivolous" consumption is as middle class as a commitment to education or health care. No wonder Bajpayee's refined tastes—in food, entertainment, and champagne—can last while he can safely relate to a perceived 'middle class' category lifestyle.

The middle class also lives distinctly healthier lives than the poor. In Duflo-Banerjee's study, the so-called categorised 'middle class' population goes to the doctor more often and spends more per visit. They are also much more likely to have access to running water, latrines, and electricity. As far as children's education is concerned, they spend much more per child, partly on more years of schooling and partly on better quality.

They also argue: "Nothing seems more mid-

dle class than the fact of having a steady well-paying job. While there are many petty entrepreneurs among the middle class, most of them do not seem to be capitalists in waiting. They (the middle class) run businesses, but for the most part only because they are still relatively poor, and every little bit helps.

If they could only find the right salaried job, they might be quite content to shut their business down. If the middle class matters for growth, it is probably not because of its entrepreneurial spirit."

The middle class (as observable in urban areas) also have fewer children and spends much more on the education and health of these children as well as on their own health. It is interesting to speculate whether this has something to do with the kind of jobs they have—or if there is a time endowment crisis they face.

Perhaps the sense of control over the future that one gets from knowing that there will be an income coming in every month, and not just the income itself, is what allows the middle class to focus on building their own careers and those of their children.

The reason why this matters is indeed close to what leads us to the idea of a "good job"—an argument this author also expanded on here (in a discussion on Rodrik's productivity framework to India's jobless growth problem).

A good job for an aspiring middle class citizen is a steady, well-paid job; a job that allows one the mental space needed to do all those things the middle class does well.

This is an idea that many development economists have often resisted on the grounds that good jobs may be expensive jobs, and expensive jobs might mean fewer jobs. But if good jobs mean that children grow up in an environment where they can make the most of their talents, one might start to think that it may all be worth it.

Unfortunately, a vanishing middle class in India (with increasing lower-income and higher-income groups) is similarly evident in the deep regression-decline of 'good' jobs available across sectors, underscoring the rise of unemployment-underemployment, especially among the aspiring, educated youth (who otherwise remain the root source of a developing nation's 'future' growing middle class). (Courtesy: The Quint)



Iran will hold presidential elections on June 28 to replace Raisi

# Iran's acting president addresses new parliament after helicopter crash killing president, others

**TEHRAN, May 27:** Iran's acting President Mohammad Mokhber addressed the country's new parliament on Monday in his first public speech since last week's helicopter crash that killed his predecessor and seven others.

His speech comes as Iran prepares for a presidential election to replace the late Ebrahim Raisi in just a month, a vote that could see the previously behind-the-scenes bureaucrat potentially run alongside others.

Meanwhile, Iran's new hard-line parliament is expected to select its new speaker on Tuesday.

In his remarks, Mokhber praised Raisi's time in office, noting that Iran's crude oil production—a key source of hard currency for the country—climbed to more than 3.6 million barrels a day. That comes after Oil Minister Javad Owji said

on Sunday that Iran was now exporting around 2 million barrels a day, despite Western sanctions targeting the Islamic Republic.

Mokhber also asserted that the country's economy remained stable under Raisi when Iran took military actions in Iraq, Israel and Pakistan in recent months.

"Three countries were hit. We hit Israel, people find that figures and indexes are the same in the morning when they wake up, price of hard currency is the same, inflation is the same, liquidity is the same and the market is full of people's needs," Mokhber claimed.

"This strength, this settlement and this power is not a usual thing, they all were because of guidance by the supreme leader and the sincere efforts of Ayatollah Raisi."

The Iranian rial has tumbled from a rate of 32,000 rials to \$1 at



the time of Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers. Today, it stands around 580,000 to \$1 in the wake of the U.S.' unilateral withdrawal from the accord and a series of attacks on shipping in the Mideast, first attributed to Iran and later involving Yemen's Houthis rebels as Israel's war against

Hamas on the Gaza Strip began over seven months ago.

On May 20, rescuers recovered the bodies of Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and others in a mountainous region in northwestern Iran following a fatal helicopter crash.

Iran will hold presidential elec-

tions on June 28 to replace Raisi. On Thursday, a five-day registration period for candidates will open. Analysts have suggested that Mokhber could be one of those to register.

Meanwhile, on Monday marked the first day for Iran's newly elected parliament, following a March election that saw the country's lowest turnout since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Of those elected to the 290-seat body, hardliners hold over 230 seats, according to an Associated Press survey.

Iran's parliament plays a secondary role in governing the country, though it can intensify pressure on a presidential administration when deciding on the annual budget and other important bills. Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 85, has the final say in all important state matters. (AP)

# Poland rolls out plans for fortifications along its border with Russia and Belarus



**WARSAW, May 27:** Defense officials in NATO member Poland on Monday presented a plan to strengthen anti-drone surveillance and on-ground military defense through a system of fortifications and barriers along about 700 kilometers (430 miles) of its eastern border with Russia and Russian ally Belarus.

The government says Poland, which supports neighboring Ukraine in its defense against Russia's aggression, is being targeted by hostile actions from Russia and Belarus. They include cyberattacks, attempted arson and migrants being pushed illegally across the border, which officials describe as intended to destabilize the European Union, of which Poland is a member.

The government is also making preparations in the case of a military attack, while stressing the primary role of deterrence.

The government of Prime Minister Donald Tusk has planned a range of security measures including in cyberspace, as well as a more than \$2.5 billion investment in strengthening surveillance, deterrence and defense along the eastern border, a system known as Shield-East that is to be completed in 2028. Work on it has started, officials said.

"The goal of the shield is to protect the territory of Poland, hamper the mobility of our adversary's troops while making such mobility easier for our own troops and to protect civilians," Defense Minister Wladyslaw Kosiniak-Kamysz said at a news conference, adding that local communities understand the need for such steps.

The shield will include "all kinds of fortifications, barriers, monitoring of the air space on every level and upgrading the existing systems," and will be integrated with the defense system across the country, Kosiniak-Kamysz said.

He stressed it was the biggest

program to strengthen NATO's eastern flank since 1945, when World War II ended.

Chief of Staff Gen. Wieslaw Kukula said it will include a network of state-of-the-art anti-drone monitoring and defense towers, anti-tank barriers and ditches, bunkers and shelters, as well as space for potential mine fields. He stressed their primary role is to deter any potential aggressor.

The officials said the system will be part of a regional defense infrastructure built jointly with the Baltic states — Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia — that are also on NATO's eastern flank. The funding will come from the government, as Poland spends over 4% of its GDP on defense, but help will also be sought from the EU because the system will also strengthen the eastern border of the 27-member bloc, they said.

Some observers noted that the much-publicized presentation came two weeks ahead of elections to the European Parliament, where Poland, a nation of some 38 million, holds 52 seats, and could be partly seen as a campaign element for the government that took office in December. The opposition also supports strengthening Poland's defense. Poland's previous right-wing government built a \$400 million wall on the border with Belarus to halt a massive inflow of migrants that began to be pushed from that direction in 2021. The current pro-EU government says that needs to be strengthened, but will be a separate project from Shield-East.

The three Baltic states were once part of the Soviet Union, while Poland was a satellite state before the 1990s. Moscow still regards the area as within its sphere of interest. To its east, Poland borders Russia's exclave of Kaliningrad, as well as NATO ally Lithuania, Moscow's ally Belarus, and Ukraine. (AP)

# Zelensky visits Spain in pursuit of more weapons to fight Russia with

**MADRID, May 27:** Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky arrived in Madrid on Monday where he was expected to sign a bilateral security agreement with Spain that will help his country fight its more than two-year war with Russia amid a recent offensive by the Kremlin's forces.

Spain's King Felipe VI met Zelensky at the capital's Barajas airport. The Ukrainian leader was due to hold talks with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez about what local media reported is a planned 1.1 billion euros (\$1.2 billion) agreement for Spain to supply Ukraine with more weapons.

Zelensky had been due to visit Spain earlier this month but he postponed all his foreign trips after the Kremlin's forces launched a cross-border offensive in the northeastern Kharkiv region and left Ukrainian troops reeling.

That push has further strained Ukraine's already depleted army, which in recent months has been fighting Russia's intense drive deeper into the partially occupied eastern Donetsk region. Zelensky said on Sunday that the Kremlin's army is mustering at another point in Russia, farther north but close to the approximately 1,000-km (600-mile) front line, presumably to try and crack Ukrainian resistance in the area.

A Western intelligence assessment suggested that Russia's Kharkiv offensive has subsided. (AP)

# EU-Israel relations take a nosedive as Spain, Ireland set to formally recognise a Palestinian state

**BRUSSELS, May 27:** Relations between the European Union and Israel took a nosedive on the eve of the diplomatic recognition of a Palestinian state by EU members Ireland and Spain, with Madrid suggesting sanctions should be considered against Israel for its continued attacks in the southern Gaza city of Rafah. Israeli Foreign Minister Katz told Spain that its consulate in Jerusalem will not be allowed to help Palestinians.

At the same time, the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, a Spaniard, threw his full weight to support the International Criminal Court, whose prosecutor is seeking an arrest warrant against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and others, including the leaders of Hamas.

"The prosecutor of the court has been strongly intimidated and accused of antisemitism," Borrell said. "The word antisemitic, it's too heavy. It's too important."

Angry words abounded Monday, with Katz accusing Spain of "rewarding terror" by recognising a Palestinian state, and saying that "the days of the Inquisition are over." He referred to the infamous Spanish institution started in the 15th century to maintain Roman Catholic orthodoxy that forced Jews and Muslims to flee, convert to Catholicism or, in some instances, face death.

"No one will force us to convert our religion or threaten our existence - those who harm us,



we will harm in return," said Katz. Even though the EU and its member nations have been steadfast in condemning the Oct 7 Hamas-led attack in which militants stormed across the Gaza border into Israel, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostage, the bloc has been equally critical of Israel's ensuing offensive that has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

The latest attacks have centred on Rafah, where Palestinian health workers said Israeli airstrikes killed at least 35 people Sunday, hit tents for displaced people and left "numerous" others trapped in flaming debris.

The UN's top court, the International Court of Justice, on Friday demanded that Israel immediately halt its offensive on Rafah, even if it stopped short of ordering a cease-fire for the Gaza enclave. "Israel has to stop its offensive in Rafah," Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares said.

Spain, Ireland and non-EU member Norway plan to make official their recognition of a Palestinian state on Tuesday. Their joint announcement last week triggered an angry response from Israeli authorities, which summoned the countries' ambassadors in Tel Aviv to the Israeli Foreign Ministry, where they were filmed while being shown videos of the Oct 7 Hamas attack and kidnapping.

Albares criticised the treatment of the ambassadors. "We reject something that is not within diplomatic courtesy and the customs of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations," he said. "But at the same time we have also agreed that we are not going to fall into any provocation that distances us from our goal," he added. "Our aim is to recognise the state of Palestine tomorrow, make all possible efforts to achieve a permanent cease-fire as soon as possible and also, in the end, to achieve that definitive peace." (AP)

# Incumbent Lithuanian president reelected in landslide win over PM

**COPENHAGEN, May 27:** Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda secured a second five-year term as Lithuanian president in a landslide victory over Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonyte.

Preliminary figures by the Lithuania's Central Electoral Commission showed that Nausėda won 74.5 per cent of the votes and Šimonyte 24.1 per cent.

The 60-year-old Nausėda is a moderate conservative and has been a strong backer of Ukraine, a position shared across most of the political spectrum.

During his time in office, Lithuania has also given refuge to many who have fled an authoritarian crackdown in neighbouring Belarus and increased repression in Russia.

"Lithuania's independence and freedom is like a fragile vessel that we must cherish, protect and prevent from cracking," Nausėda said Sunday night after the ballots had been counted, the Baltic News Service reported.

Speaking of the Baltic country's allies, the United States, Germany, Poland, among others, he added that "We have a very similar position on fundamental issues, like support for Ukraine, the attitude towards the Russian threat."

Nausėda, a former banker, entered politics with his successful presidential run in 2019. He and Šimonyte won the first round but failed to muster the 50 per cent of the votes needed to win the presidency outright.

The election came at a time as Ukraine gains in Ukraine are fueling greater fears about Moscow's intentions, particularly in the strategically important Baltic region.

Lithuania is north of Poland and south of the two other Baltic countries, Latvia and Estonia. It separates Belarus, an ally of Russia, from Kaliningrad, a heavily militarised Russian exclave on the Baltic Sea that is separated from the Russian mainland.

The president's main tasks in NATO-member Lithuania's political system are overseeing foreign and defence policy, along with acting as the supreme commander of the armed forces.

Given that Lithuania is strategically located on NATO's eastern flank, the presidency of the relatively small nation has added importance as tensions rise between Russia and the West over the war in Ukraine.

Before the votes were counted Sunday evening, Šimonyte conceded defeat and congratulated her opponent.

Both Nausėda who ran as an independent candidate, and Šimonyte who became prime minister in 2020, have voiced support of Ukraine.

The pair also ran against each other in a presidential runoff in 2019, when Nausėda won with 66 per cent of the votes.

Nausėda will be sworn in for a new five-year term in July. Šimonyte said she will return to work as prime minister in Lithuania, a country of nearly 3 million people on Monday, Lithuanian television said.

Turnout in Sunday's election was 49.15 per cent. (AP)

# US lawmakers pledge support for Taiwan and its new president after China's military drills

**TAIPEI, May 27:** A US congressional delegation met Taiwan's new leader on Monday in a show of support days after China held drills around the self-governing island in response to his inauguration.

Rep. Andy Barr, the co-chair of the Taiwan caucus in the US Congress, said the United States is fully committed to supporting Taiwan militarily, diplomatically and economically.

"There should be no doubt, there should be no scepticism in the United States, Taiwan or anywhere in the world, of American resolve to maintain the status quo and peace in the Taiwan Strait," the Republican from Kentucky said at a news conference in the capital, Taipei, after the delegation met Taiwan President Lai Ching-te.

China regards Taiwan as a renegade province that must come under its control, by force if necessary. The US, like most countries, does not have formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan but is bound by its own laws to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

The Chinese government expressed strong



opposition to the congressional visit, saying it undermined China-US relations and peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, referring to the waterway between China and Taiwan.

The lawmakers' visit "ran against the political commitment of the US government to maintain only unofficial relations with Taiwan, sending a seriously wrong signal to the separatist force of Taiwan independence," Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mao Ning said in Beijing.

Lai, who took office one week ago, is expected to continue the policies of Tsai Ing-wen, his predecessor from the same Democratic Pro-

gressive Party. The new foreign minister, Lin Chia-lung, noted the recent Chinese drills and called the American delegation's visit "an important gesture of solidarity" at a critical time.

The delegation included four Republicans and two Democrats and was led by Rep. Michael McCaul, the chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Last year, China sanctioned the Texas Republican after he visited Taiwan in April.

"America is and always will be a reliable partner, and no amount of coercion or intimidation will slow down or stop the routine visits by the Congress to Taiwan," he said.

McCaul cited congressional approval last month of a military aid bill for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan. China firmly opposes the US arming Taiwan, Mao said.

The other delegation members were Republicans Young Kim from California and Joe Wilson from South Carolina and Democrats Jimmy Panetta from California and Chrissy Houlahan from Pennsylvania. (AP)

# Bangladesh PM Hasina reiterates commitment to execute verdicts against arch-rival Khalida Zia's son

**DHAKA, May 27:** Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has reiterated her government's firm determination to bring back her arch-rival Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman from London and execute the court verdict against him.

Rahman, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) President who has helmed the largest opposition party since the 2018 jailing of his mother, two-time Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, has been in London since his conviction six years ago in absentia. The court ruled that he masterminded a deadly grenade attack on a campaign rally attended by Hasina and was sentenced to life imprisonment. Rahman, 56, insists the charge is politically fabricated.

"Those who will carry out arson attacks and burn people must not be spared. Whoever the big brother they maintain and whatever they do, we will not spare them, it's

clear. Our actions will continue against those who will cause damage to people," Hasina, 76, said.

"Now the only task is to bring back the black sheep (Tarique). We will bring the convict in the 10-truck arms haul case, August 21, 2004, grenade attack and champion corruption from wherever he stays and execute the sentences," she said on Sunday.

"We have already held discussions with the British government so that they repatriate the fugitive convict to us to execute his conviction," she said.

Hasina said the people of the country did not want to see the militants and arsonists in power again.

"If the punishment of the black sheep (Tarique) is executed, the

countrymen will get free from the grips of the militants and arsonists," she said.

Referring to arson attacks in the country in 2013, 2014 and 2015, she said recurrence of such heinous acts will be stopped.

Hasina said she will ensure peace and security with the execution of the court verdicts against Rahman and the fugitive convicted killers of the Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, also her father, after bringing them back to Bangladesh.

"My target is to ensure economic freedom and continued journey towards prosperity alongside ensuring peace and security. We are working to attain the goal," she said. (PTI)



# North Korea plans to launch a rocket soon, likely carrying its second military spy satellite

**SEOUL, May 27:** North Korea announced plans to launch a rocket apparently carrying its second military spy satellite during an eight-day period starting Monday, drawing quick, strong rebukes from neighbours South Korea and Japan.

The notification of the planned launch, banned under UN resolutions, came as South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida met Chinese Premier Li Qiang in Seoul for their first trilateral meeting in more than four years.

Japan's coast guard said it was notified by North Korea about its planned launch of a "satellite rocket", with a warning of caution in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and China and east of the main Philippine island of Luzon beginning Monday through midnight June 3.

North Korea provides Japan with its launch information because Japan's coast guard coordinates and distributes maritime safety information in East Asia.

North Korea's planned launch is thought to be an attempt to put its second military spy satellite into orbit. South Korea's military said Friday it detected signs of suspected preparations to launch a spy satellite at North Korea's main Tongchangri launch facility in the northwest.

The UN bans North Korea from conducting any satellite launches, viewing them as covers for testing long-range missile technology. North Korea has steadfastly maintained it has the right to launch satellites and test missiles. It says spy satellites will allow it to better monitor the US and South Korea's moves and enhance the precision strike capability of its nuclear-ca-



table missiles.

"Any launch (by North Korea) using ballistic missile technology would directly violate UN Security Council resolutions and undermine peace and security of the region and the world," Yoon said at the start of the meeting with Kishida and Li. "If North Korea presses ahead with its launch despite the international warning, I think the international community must sternly deal with it."

Kishida said he strongly urges

North Korea to cancel the launch. China is a North Korean ally, and Li didn't mention the North Korean satellite. In phone talks earlier Monday, senior diplomats from Japan, South Korea and the United States agreed to call on North Korea to abandon the launch. South Korea's Unification Ministry, which deals with North Korea, separately called a satellite launch by the North "a provocation that seriously threatens our regional security."

Later Monday, South Korea mobilised 20 fighter jets for a drill meant to demonstrate its resolve to punish North Korea in the event of provocation, according to South Korea's military. Japanese officials said their missile interceptors remain ready to shoot down any debris from a North Korean rocket if it falls on Japanese territory. (AP)

# SL Prez Wickremesinghe will vie for re-election: Minister

**COLOMBO, May 27:** Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe will certainly contest the presidential poll to seek re-election and will announce his candidacy in the next two weeks, a senior government minister said on Monday.

Harin Fernando, the Tourism minister and a close ally of Wickremesinghe, said: "I can say with certainty that the President will contest." The island nation's Elections Commission earlier this month said the presidential election would be conducted between September 17 and October 16.

The ruling Sri Lanka People's Front, commonly known by its Sinhalese name Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP), which has the current parliamentary majority, had pressed Wickremesinghe to hold the parliamentary election ahead of the presidential poll.

Wickremesinghe, 75, is yet to announce his candidacy despite declarations by two other main opposition leaders: Sajith Premadasa the main opposition leader, and the Marxist JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake.

Fernando said Wickremesinghe would announce his candidature within the next two weeks.

Wickremesinghe, from the arch-rival party United National Party (UNP), succeeded SLPP-elected president Gotabaya Rajapaksa to become president for the rest of Rajapaksa's term when the latter was ousted, after the island nation declared first international default, during street protests which lasted between April and July of 2022. Rajapaksa gave in to calls for his resignation due to his inability to handle the unprecedented economic crisis.

Some of the SLPP members have turned into Wickremesinghe supporters while the party also saw other members split as well to form other political entities. (PTI)



## Orange alert issued in remaining 6 districts, which are likely to record heavy rains, winds

### Cyclone Remal: Tripura sounds red alert in two districts

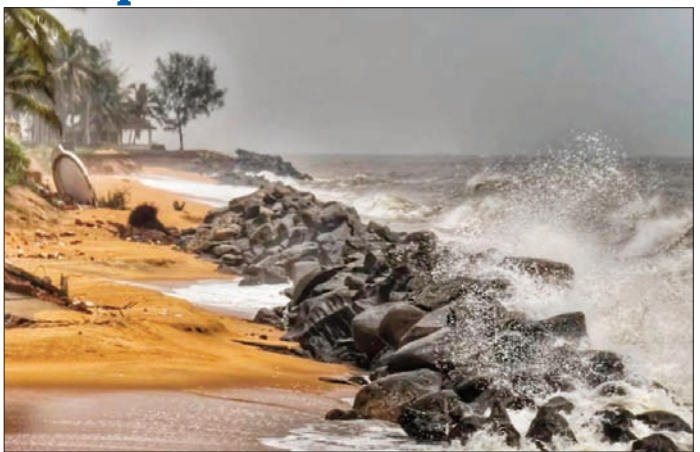
AGARTALA, May 27: The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a red alert in two districts - Sepahijala and Gumati - in view of the possible impact of cyclone Remal, an official said on Monday.

An orange alert has also been sounded in the remaining six districts of the northeastern state which is likely to witness heavy rain and gusty winds as a result of the cyclone.

"A red alert has been sounded in Sepahijala and Gumati districts in anticipation of heavy to very heavy rainfall during the day while an orange alert has been sounded in the remaining six districts of the state", Director of Indian Meteorological department, Agartala, Partha Roy told PTI.

Meanwhile, heavy rain lashed Tripura on Monday under the influence of cyclonic storm Remal while 11 flights were cancelled from Agartala airport due to bad weather, officials said.

"Tripura received average rainfall of 40.73 mm on Monday with West Tripura district recording the highest of 59.50 mm. There is no



report of any substantial damage or loss of life from any district except uprooting of trees and blockage of roads," said an official of the Revenue department.

"Altogether 11 flights to and from MBB Airport here have been cancelled on Monday due to cyclone Remal. One Agartala-Delhi flight was diverted to Guwahati airport because the wind speed was more than the normal range," MBB airport director K C Meena told PTI.

to tackle the situation. I appeal to the people to remain in the highest degree of alertness during the period," the CM said in a Facebook post.

"Rainfall was reported from various parts of the state. We are ready to meet any eventuality," an official of the state Disaster Management Authority said.

Earlier, South, Dhalai, Khowai, and West districts had been brought under 'red alert' (implying 'take action') but now they are under 'orange alert' ('be prepared for action').

"Thunderstorm is very likely to occur over six districts due to the cyclone. Light to moderate rain and thunderstorm with lightning accompanied by gusty wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is very likely to occur at many places over South, Gumati, Sepahijala, Dhalai and Khowai districts," Roy said.

The northeastern state is unlikely to be severely affected by the cyclonic storm as it made landfall in coastal areas of West Bengal and Bangladesh which is far away, he said. (PTI)

### 13 persons penalised for selling tobacco products in restricted areas

HT Correspondent

DIMAPUR, May 27: A total of 13 people have been penalised under the Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act (COTPA) 2003 for selling tobacco products in and around educational institutions in Wokha on Monday.

Tobacco products were also seized from the shops falling within the restricted areas. The defaulters were penalised under Section 6B of COTPA with a fine of ₹ 200 each.

A joint team of the COTPA flying squad led by the officer-in-charge of the Wokha Police Station, staff of the National Tobacco Control Programme (NTCP), representatives from district administration, Lotha Student's Union led by its president Lirhonthung Kithan and Wokha women police personnel penalised the 13 after conducting a drive against the sale of tobacco products in the restricted areas. The team members said they would be frequently conducting such raids in the coming days also.

Directing the shopkeepers to abide by the COTPA, they warned that necessary legal action would be initiated as per the provision of the law. The seized tobacco products were destroyed the same day at the Wokha Police Station premises in the presence of all the squad members.

### Programme on capacity building held

HT Bureau

GUWAHATI, May 27: A week-long capacity development programme on the theme "Catalyzing Academic Reforms through Capacity Building of Universities Administration" has been organised by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU), University of Science and Technology Meghalaya-Academic (USTM) and Administrative Development Centre in collaboration with USTM's department of rural development.

Held in online mode from May 20 to 25, the inaugural of the programme was addressed by G.D. Sharma, vice chancellor of USTM and president of AIU, Pankaj Mittal, secretary general of AIU, B.L. Ahuja, vice chancellor of the Bodoland University and Rajul K. Gajjar, vice chancellor of the Gujarat Technological University. The five key speakers who addressed the webinar include P.G. Rao, scientist of CSIR, New Delhi, Rajan Saxena, former vice-chancellor of SVKM's Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, Mumbai, A. B. Joshi, director of academics of Kaushalya: the Skill University Ahmedabad, Safia Farooqui, professor and director of the Dr. D.Y. Patil Vidyapeeth Centre for Online Learning and Rajeev Ahuja, officiating director of the Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati.

The webinar centered on strengthening university administration capabilities, highlighting the importance of skill distribution and modern teaching methods in line with NEP 2020. It emphasised innovative learning and teachers' training, integrating digital tools and strategic partnerships to improve administrative efficiency and educational experiences. Continuous training, mobility programmes, quality assurance mechanisms and sustainable plans for academic reforms were key topics. Discussions also covered governance, resource management, stakeholder engagement and the benefits of collaborative approaches.

## MPCC observes Nehru's 60<sup>th</sup> death anniversary

MPCC president K Meghachandra, CLP leader and former chief minister Okram Ibobi Singh led the party members and others in offering rich floral tributes at the statue of the former Prime Minister inside the Congress Bhavan



IMPHAL, May 27: The Manipur Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) commemorated the 60th death anniversary of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister by holding a

## Meghalaya govt takes measures to tackle cyclone Remal



SHILLONG, May 27: The Meghalaya government is taking proactive measures to ensure safety of its citizens in the wake of heavy rainfall and strong winds due to cyclone 'Remal'.

After chairing a review meeting, deputy chief minister in-charge of home (police), Prestone Tynsong said on Monday that the government was fully prepared to tackle any eventuality arising out of heavy rainfall.

"We are fully prepared, be it financially or physically, to tackle whatever situation arises. We have instructed all the agencies, be it government, NGOs or stakeholders up to the village level that they should cooperate and also work closely with the government machinery, which is already linked up

to village level," he told reporters.

Urging the citizens not to panic, Tynsong said, "...the prediction says that this cyclone will go on till tomorrow. We have specifically instructed all the deputy commissioners to work round the clock during the ongoing cyclone."

"In few districts, we may be vulnerable and we have instructed the district administrations to be more vigilant and also to be in action mode," he said.

He said that East Jaintia Hills, West Jaintia Hills, South West Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, East Khasi Hills, Eastern West Khasi Hills are most likely to be vulnerable.

On the problem of flooding due to absence of proper drainage, Tynsong said, "We need a joint ef-

fort on the part of SMB as well as PWD roads. We are consulting with various departments and will take necessary actions."

He said the government has made proper drainage along the sides of the road in Demseinoing and few other places in Shillong.

Tynsong also informed that the government has earmarked Rs 20 crore for each district administration to provide immediate relief to victims in case of a natural calamity.

The deputy CM said the state forest department is responsible to identify precarious trees.

On the other hand, the Meghalaya government has directed closure of schools and colleges on Tuesday in view of the cyclone Remal.

The order for closure of educational institutions has been issued by different district administrations of the state.

An order issued by the East Khasi Hills district magistrate, SC Sadhu said that in view of the cyclone Remal, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) had issued a weather warning stating extremely heavy rainfall with strong winds in East Khasi Hills district on Monday and Tuesday. Therefore, to avoid any untoward incidents all schools and colleges in East Khasi Hills district would remain closed on Tuesday. (NNN)

### Kolkata airport closure affects flight service from Imphal airport



IMPHAL, May 27: Normal flight services from the Bir Tikendrajit International Airport in Imphal were disrupted on Sunday following the closure of the Kolkata airport, official sources said.

Flights were expected to resume on Monday after a 21-hour suspension as the Kolkata airport was expected to open the aerodrome on Monday at 9 am.

The flight operations at the Kolkata airport were suspended due to Cyclone Remal.

The closure of the aerodrome forced authorities at the Imphal airport to cancel at least seven flights for the day.

The affected airlines were Indigo (IGO-7713/ 7947, IGO-6514/6716, IGO-7948/7155, IGO-275/6807) Air India (AI 734), Alliance Air (91731) and Air India Express (15-9901/9902).

Meanwhile, the effect of Cyclone Remal was felt in Manipur beginning from the night on Sunday till Monday, according to the MET report.

The cyclone would be at its maximum on Monday and would affect hill districts of Churachandpur and Pherzawl and its adjoining areas as per the latest weather report.

The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) forecasted that heavy downpours were likely to occur in the entire Northeast region for at least the next three days, beginning Sunday evening.

The weather department also issued an orange alert for May 26, warning of heavy to very heavy rains accompanied by gusty winds reaching speeds of 50-60 kmph to 70 kmph over Manipur and the rest of northeastern states.

Looking ahead, the weather department also issued warnings for Monday, placing the rest of the northeastern states including Manipur, under an alert as these areas are expected to experience extremely heavy rainfall, with wind speeds potentially reaching up to 60 kmph.

The IMD also put an orange alert for all seven northeastern states, indicating continued heavy rainfall on May 28. (NNN)

### Manipur class 10 examination results announced, pass percentage 93.03



IMPHAL, May 27: The Board of Secondary Education Manipur on Monday declared the results of the class 10 examination with 93.03 per cent of students clearing the test.

The pass percentage of 93.03 per cent this year, is the highest in the last 10 years, an official said.

The pass percentage of boys was 93.07, while that of girls was 93.00 per cent.

A total of 37,547 students appeared in the examination of

which 34,931 students cleared the exam, the official said.

For the first time in Manipur, grades were awarded to students and no merit list was announced.

The state cabinet had earlier this year approved the implementation of the grading system.

Tengnoupal district recorded the highest pass percentage of 99.65 per cent while Jiribam district recorded the lowest pass percentage of 50.71 per cent. (PTI)

### HYC seeks police intervention in drug menace



SHILLONG, May 27: The Hyniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) has requested the intervention of the Meghalaya director general of police (DGP), Idashisha Nongrang into the problem of drug menace in the state.

Submitting a memorandum to Nongrang on Monday, HYC president Roy Kubar Synrem said the state police department should strengthen the drug supply reduction strategy.

"We would like to suggest that the police department should adopt a proper and more stringent strategy to reduce the supply of drugs in the state. We would also like to suggest that the state police, the Border Security Force and the custom and central excise should conduct joint operations and share information on drugs by pooling in resources to effectively tackle the menace of drugs in the state as frequently as possible. They should also rope in the village authorities in this effort. Regular checking should be conducted more frequently at the entry points of the state," he said.

Synrem said that the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985, provides for stringent provisions for offences related to drugs abuse and trafficking. Despite the fact that major offences under the Act are non-bailable, it has been observed that in several cases the drug offenders secure acquittal on technical grounds. A large number of offenders in such cases are acquitted due to non-compliance of mandatory provisions and the prescribed procedure.

"The acquittals in serious offences particularly in NDPS cases create a sense of insecurity in the society and undermine the faith of the common man in the administration of the

criminal justice system. Hence, it is incumbent upon the investigating agencies/prosecutors to be well-versed in the compliances of mandatory provisions and the prescribed procedures and to discharge their assigned duties in a professional manner in order to achieve the desired objective of the law," he said adding, "Therefore, to accomplish the purpose and objective of the Act and to ensure conviction of offenders in NDPS cases, the enforcement agencies of the state are expected to know and adhere to the provisions of the Act during investigation and also ensure vigorous follow up during the prosecution stage."

Also emphasizing the need to create awareness on the provision of receiving stolen property, the HYC president said, "Section 317 of The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (Repealing the Indian Penal Code, 1860), which shall come into force on July 1, 2024 provides for the provisions relating 'receiving or retaining' any stolen property.

During our interactions with the 'drug users' as well as their family members, we have come across many cases where the users in order to get money for buying drugs are forced to commit theft even from their homes or family members. These stolen properties are then sold at take away prices to some persons."

"So in order to create awareness about this particular provision of law and to create a deterrent effect so as selling and buying of stolen properties, especially by drugs users, are not easy. We urged upon you to take necessary steps to inform the public about this provision and the consequences of violating the same," he added. (NNN)



# Architect of modern India: Cong pays tributes to Nehru on death anniversary

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** The Congress on Monday paid rich tributes to India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary with party chief Mallikarjun Kharge saying the country's history is incomplete without the incomparable contribution of "the architect of modern India".

Kharge and former Congress president Sonia Gandhi also paid floral tributes to the former prime minister at his memorial 'Shantivan' here.

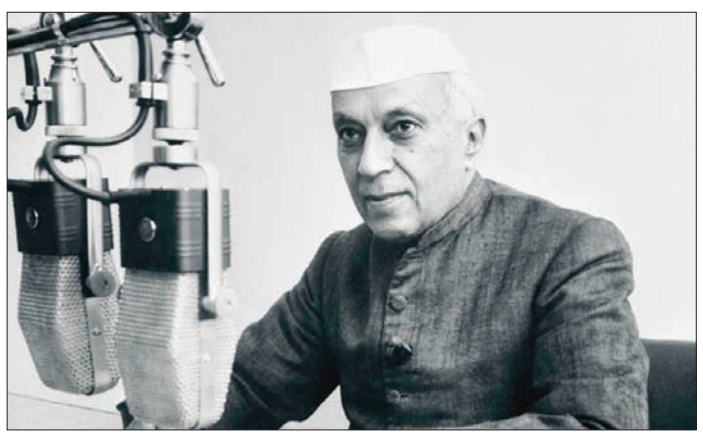
In a post in Hindi on X, Kharge said the history of India is incomplete without the incomparable contribution of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of modern India, who took India forward in scientific, economic, industrial and various fields.

Nehru was a dedicated guardian of democracy and our source of inspiration, he said.

"Our humble tribute to 'Hind ke Jawahar' on his death anniversary," Kharge said.

The Congress president quoted Nehru as saying that the protection of the country, progress of the country, and unity of the country is the national religion of all of us.

"We may follow different reli-



gions, live in different states, speak different languages, but that should not create any wall between us. All people should get equal opportunity in progress. We do not want some people in our country to be very rich and most of the people to be poor," Nehru was quoted as saying.

Even today, the Congress party is following the same path of "justice," Kharge said.

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi also paid tributes to his great grandfather.

"Respectful tributes to the architect of modern India and the first Prime Minister of the country, Pan-

dit Jawaharlal Nehru on his death anniversary. As a visionary, he dedicated his entire life to building India through the freedom movement, establishing democracy, secularism and laying the foundation of the Constitution. His values will always guide us," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X.

Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh paid rich tributes to Nehru on his 60th death anniversary.

"On May 27, 1964 Nehru conducted his usual almost-monthly free-wheeling press interaction. Towards the end of that meet he was asked about succession and he jok-

ingly replied: 'my life is not ending very soon'," Ramesh recalled.

"Nehru then spent a few days in Dehradun from where we have his very last photo alive. He returned to New Delhi on May 26th. Perhaps the last act of his that night was to write a letter to Seiichi Hirose in Japan. A few hours later, in the early morning of May 27th at 6:25 am, Nehru lost consciousness, and he was declared dead at 2 pm," he said.

Ramesh note that all through his extraordinary history-shaping life, Nehru was profoundly influenced by the life and message of the Buddha.

"His study and bedroom are a testimony to that long-standing fascination. Quite amazingly his very last day on earth would be on Buddha Purnima Day and his very last letter would be to a devout Buddhist," he said.

Nehru's reading of history and his desire to connect antiquity to the new republic of India that was being established led him to champion the use of two legacies of Buddha's greatest propagator Emperor Ashoka - the chakra in the national flag, and the Sarnath lion capital as the national emblem, Ramesh said. (PTI)

## PM talks of 'mangalsutra', mutton, 'mujra', but not about 'Make in India' which has flopped: Kharge

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Monday hit out at the Modi government on the state of the economy, exports and the rising trade deficit besides the 'Make in India' programme and accused him of practising "fake" nationalism by making China its biggest trade partner.

"Narendra Modi ji speaks about Mangalsutra, Mutton, Machhali, Mughal and Mujra, but does not talk about 'Make in India'? Why Modi ji does not utter a single word on the economy in his numerous election speeches? The answer lies in his Government's abject failure," Kharge said in a post on X.

"The 'Make in India' programme has flopped, the PLI Scheme floundered and exports are in a free fall," he alleged.

Drawing a parallel between the Congress-led UPA and 10 years of the BJP-led NDA government, he said the manufacturing growth (at constant 2015 USD) during the Congress-UPA rule from 2004 to 2014 was 7.85 per cent while that during the Modi's NDA rule from 2014 to 2022 was 6.0 per cent.

The Congress president said India's export growth during the Congress-UPA rule from 2004 to 2010 was 186.59 per cent and from



2009-2014 was 94.39 per cent, while that during the Modi-NDA rule from 2014-2020 was 21.14 per cent, and during 2019-2024 was 56.86 per cent.

"Despite the 56-inch chest thumping, App-bans and fake nationalism, Modi ji made sure that China becomes India's largest trade partner.

"Modi ji's clean chit to China, post the supreme sacrifice of our brave soldiers in Galwan, came with an add-on gift. Add-on gift - The import value of Chinese goods to India rose from USD 3.32 billion in June 2020 to USD 5.58 billion in July 2020 i.e. a whopping 68 per cent increase," Kharge claimed.

The difference between India's import of Chinese goods is ₹7 lakh crore higher than India's exports in just last year, he said.

On the widening trade deficit and diminishing India's clout, the

Congress chief said, "India, under Modi ji has recorded a trade deficit with 9 of its top 10 trading partners, including China, Russia, Singapore, and Korea, in 2023-24."

India's trade deficit under Modi increased by a record 194.19 per cent, he said, adding that during the Congress-UPA rule from 2013-14, it was ₹8.1 lakh crore while during the Modi-NDA rule from 2023-24, it was ₹23.83 lakh crore.

"Modi ji says he may not have been born 'biological', but the 'logical' thing to do is to 'vote BJP out' and 'vote for INDIA'," Kharge said ahead of the last phase of polling on June 1.

Meanwhile, in another post, Congress leader P Chidambaram targeted the government on the state of the Indian Railways where the poor passengers have to face the brunt.

"After a decade of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, India's prime people-mover, the Railways — a key focus area for his administration — carry fewer passengers, are losing money but are costlier, especially for poorer passengers, who are packed into proportionately fewer seats in trains run at largely the same speed as during the previous government," Chidambaram said. (PTI)

## J&K records highest voter turnout in 35 yrs; CEC says assembly polls to be held there soon

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** The Election Commission on Monday said the voter turnout in Jammu and Kashmir this time was the highest in a Lok Sabha election in the last 35 years with the Kashmir Valley witnessing a "massive" 30 percentage point jump in poll participation compared to 2019.

Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said this achievement sits on a 25 per cent increase in the number of contesting candidates since 2019.

"This active participation is a huge positive for the assembly elections to be held soon so that the democratic process continues to thrive in the Union Territory," he said.

The poll panel also said the combined voter turnout at the polling stations for the entire Union Territory with five Lok Sabha seats was 58.46 per cent. On Saturday, CEC Kumar told PTI Videos that encouraged by the voter turnout in Jammu and

Kashmir in this Lok Sabha polls, the Election Commission will "very soon" initiate the process of conducting the assembly polls in the Union Territory.

The voter turnout of 50.86 per cent from the three parliamentary constituencies in the Kashmir Valley echoes the faith of the people in the democratic process, the Election Commission said, adding the poll participation percentage witnessed a 30-point jump from the 2019 general elections where it was 19.16 per cent.

The three seats in the Valley — Srinagar, Baramulla and Anantnag-Rajouri — recorded a voter turnout of 38.49 per cent, 59.1 per cent and 54.84 per cent, respectively, all of which have been the highest in the last three decades.

The other two seats in the Union Territory — Udhampur and Jammu — which fall in the Jammu region, recorded 68.27 per cent and 72.22 per cent

voter turnout respectively, it said.

The Election Commission said that an increasing number of young people have asserted their faith and embraced democracy in a big way.

Another interesting perspective is the people in the age group of 18-59 years who constitute over 80 per cent of the electorate in each of the five Lok Sabha seats of the Union Territory, it underlined.

The high poll percentage in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls is reflective of their faith in democracy, which is a positive and heartening development, the poll panel stressed. Whenever an assembly election is held in Jammu and Kashmir, it will be the first since the August 2019 abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories with the other being Ladakh which has one Lok Sabha seat and no provision for a legislative assembly. (PTI)

## INDIA govt to scrap Agnipath scheme, send ₹8,500 to women's accounts each month: Rahul

**BAKHTIYARPUR/PALIGANJ (BIHAR), May 27:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Monday claimed that the INDIA bloc, if voted to power, would scrap the Agnipath scheme of recruitment in defence services and deposit ₹8,500 to every woman's account in each month.

Addressing back-to-back election rallies in favour of Mahagathbandhan nominees in Bihar, he asserted that Narendra Modi will not be able to become the prime minister again, since there is a clear wave in favour of the INDIA bloc across the country.

"When the INDIA bloc will form the government, the Agnipath scheme will be withdrawn," Gandhi said at Bakhtiyarpur.

The scheme, announced by the Narendra Modi government in 2022, envisages recruiting young soldiers, called 'Agniveers' after appointment, on a contractual basis for four years and retiring 75 per cent of them without certain benefits enjoyed by those who were not employed under this programme.

He said, "The INDIA bloc, if voted to power, will throw the Agnipath scheme into the dustbin. Modi Ji has turned soldiers into labourers. The Centre has made two categories in the Army — Agniveer and the others. If an Agniveer gets injured or martyred, he will neither get a martyr status nor compensation... Why is this discrimination?"

After the formation of the INDIA bloc government at the Centre, Gandhi said, "From July, ₹8,500 will be deposited in women's accounts every month. This will change the financial condition of every family.

Taking a jibe at the prime minister's 'sent by God' comment, the Congress leader remarked in jest, "After June 4, if ED asks Modi about corruption, he will say I don't know anything...I was sent by God'."



Gandhi claimed that Modi has created 22 billionaires, while the INDIA bloc government would create crores of millionaires.

He accused PM Modi of waiving loans worth Rs 16 lakh crore of his "billionaire friends", and said the country will never forgive him for this.

The former Congress president alleged that Modi snatched money from the poor and gave it to corporates who invested it in foreign countries.

"This election is to save the country, save the constitution, save democracy and save reservation for the poor," he said at another rally in Paliganj.

The Congress leader also claimed that the government formed by the INDIA bloc after the elections would open all closed industries and fill up 30 lakh job vacancies.

RJD leader and former Bihar deputy chief minister Tejashwi Yadav, Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) Liberation general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP) chief Mukesh Sahni, and other INDIA bloc leaders attended the rallies addressed by Gandhi. (PTI)

## SC refuses to entertain BJP's plea

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a plea filed by the BJP challenging a Calcutta High Court order that had refused to interfere with a single-judge verdict restraining the party from issuing advertisements that are allegedly violative of the model code during the Lok Sabha polls.

A vacation bench of Justices J K Maheshwari and K V Viswanathan refused to interfere with the high court order.

"Prima facie, the advertisement is disparaging," the bench said. Senior advocate P S Patwalia, appearing for the BJP, sought permission to withdraw the matter after the bench expressed disinclination to entertain the matter. The matter was dismissed as withdrawn.

On May 22, a division bench of the high court had said it was not inclined to entertain the appeal against the interim order passed by the single-judge bench.

The single-judge bench on May 20 had restrained the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) from publishing advertisements that violated the MCC until June 4, the day the Lok Sabha poll results are scheduled to be declared. The court had also restrained the saffron party from publishing the advertisements mentioned by the ruling Trinamool Congress (TMC) in West Bengal, in its petition claiming unverified allegations against it and its workers. (PTI)

## Sexual abuse case: Prajwal Revanna says he will appear before SIT on May 31

**BENGALURU, May 27:** Exactly a month after he left the country, Hassan MP Prajwal Revanna, who is facing charges of sexually abusing several women, has said he will appear before the Special Investigation Team (SIT), probing the cases against him, on May 31.

Terminating the cases against him as "false" and part of a "political conspiracy", he said he had gone into depression.

"I will personally come before the SIT on Friday, May 31 at 10 am and cooperate with the investigation and also respond to it (charges). I have faith in the judiciary and I am confident that I will come out of false cases, through court," Prajwal said in a video statement that is now widely being circulated.

There was no independent confirmation from the JD(S) or the family of the suspended party MP immediately over the matter.

"Let the blessings of God, people and my family be on me. I will surely appear before SIT on May 31, Friday. After coming, I will try to put an end to all this. Keep faith in me," he added in his video statement in Kannada.

Apologising to his parents, grandfather Deve Gowda, uncle H D Kumaraswamy, people of the state, and party workers, Prajwal said, "I have come before you to share information, as I had not disclosed as to where I'm in foreign (country)."

Noting that he had sought a week to respond to the SIT notice through his 'X' account and his lawyers, Prajwal said, "Despite seeking time, the very next day Congress senior leaders including Rahul Gandhi started discussing things (about me), at public meetings."

"They indulged in political conspiracy. Looking at all this, I went into depression and isolation. So, I sought your apology first and your forgiveness," he said.

Alleging that a political conspiracy was hatched against him in his constituency of Hassan too by some forces, the MP said, "As I was growing politically, to diminish me, they all got together. Looking at all these things, I was shocked, so I was a bit away. So, no one should mistake (me) for it."

Prajwal (33), the grandson of JD(S) patriarch H D Deve Gowda and the NDA candidate from Hassan Lok Sabha segment, is facing charges of sexually abusing women.

He reportedly left for Germany on April 27, a day after Hassan went to polls, and is still at large. A "Blue Corner Notice" seeking information on his whereabouts has already been issued by Interpol, following a request by the SIT via the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

A Special Court for Elected Representatives issued an arrest warrant on May 18 against Prajwal Revanna, following an application moved by the SIT.

The Congress-led Karnataka government has urged the Centre to cancel his diplomatic passport, even as it has stated that there has been no official communication from the union government over the matter yet.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has served a show cause notice to Prajwal asking why his diplomatic passport should not be cancelled as sought by the Karnataka government in view of allegations of sexual abuse against him.

The election took place on April 26, at that time there was no case against him, and SIT was also not formed, he said. "My trip abroad on April 26 was also planned earlier. So, I left (abroad) after three or four days... when I was watching YouTube, a news channel, I learnt (about the development back home). After that SIT also issued a notice."

The scandal triggered a political storm with the ruling Congress and BJP-JD(S) engaging in a slugfest.

While the Congress government has formed a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the cases, the BJP and JD(S) — NDA partners — have demanded that it be handed over to the CBI, and action be taken against those behind the circulation of explicit videos.

The cases of sexual abuse came to light after number of pendrives allegedly containing explicit videos involving Prajwal were reportedly circulated in Hassan, ahead of Lok Sabha polls there on April 26. (PTI)

## Alternative to electoral bond scheme should be found: Shah

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Home Minister Amit Shah believes the influence of black money will increase during the ongoing Lok Sabha elections following the Supreme Court's decision to scrap the electoral bond scheme, and suggested all stakeholders will have to deliberate and decide on an alternative. If the impact of black money rises, then an alternative should be found, he said, adding that it is for Parliament to debate and decide on any other mechanism for funding to political parties. He told PTI in an interview on Saturday that the electoral bond scheme, which allowed donors to fund political parties anonymously by purchasing bonds from the SBI, was scrapped at a crucial time. The Supreme Court had struck down the scheme in February, a month before the Lok Sabha elections were announced. Replying to a question on the issue, he said, "I believe and this is my guess that it will increase the influence of black money in elections and politics. When political parties submit their account for this fiscal year, then how much money is by cash donation and how much is through cheque will be known." (PTI)

# India's rain-fed agri areas likely to receive above-normal monsoon rain this year

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** India's core monsoon zone covering most of the rain-fed agriculture areas in the country are predicted to receive above-normal rainfall this season, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Thursday.

Below-normal monsoon rainfall is expected in north-east India, normal in northwest, and above-normal in central and south peninsular regions of the country, Director General of IMD Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said at a virtual press conference.

Last month, the IMD said the country could see above-normal rainfall in the four-month monsoon season (June to September) with cumulative rainfall estimated at 106 per cent of the long-period average of 87 cm.

"India's monsoon core zone comprising most of the rain-fed agriculture areas are likely to receive above-normal rainfall (more than 106 per cent of the long period average)," Mohapatra said.

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal form the country's core monsoon zone where agriculture is primarily rain-fed.

The IMD director general said the country is likely to experience normal rainfall (92-108 per cent of the long period average of 166.9 mm) in June.

"Barring a few parts of southern peninsular India, normal to above-normal maximum temperatures are expected in the country in June," the senior meteorologist said, adding that conditions are favourable for monsoon



onset over Kerala in the next five days. With the crippling heat testing power grids and triggering drought-like conditions in parts of the country, a prediction of above-normal monsoonal rainfall comes as a huge relief for the nation.

However, normal cumulative rainfall does not guarantee uniform temporal and spatial distribution of rain across the country, with climate change further increasing the variability of the rain-bearing system.

Climate scientists say the number of rainy days is declining while heavy rain events (more rain over a short period) are increasing, leading to frequent droughts and floods. The monsoon is critical for India's agricultural landscape, with 52 per cent of the net cultivated area relying on it. It is also crucial for replenishing reservoirs critical for drinking water, apart from power generation across the country.

According to the Central Water Commission, water

storage in 150 major reservoirs in India dropped to just 24 per cent of their live storage last week, exacerbating water shortages in many states and significantly affecting hydropower generation.

June and July are considered the most important monsoon months for agriculture because most of the sowing for the Kharif crop takes place during this period.

El Nino conditions are prevailing at present, and La Nina may set in by August-September, scientists say. While El Nino — periodic warming of surface waters in the central Pacific Ocean — is associated with weaker monsoon winds and drier conditions in India, La Nina — the antithesis of El Nino — leads to plentiful rainfall during the monsoon.

Data from the 1951-2023 period shows India experienced above-normal rainfall in the monsoon season on all nine occasions when La Nina followed an El Nino event. The country gauged above-normal or normal monsoon in 20 out of the 22 La Nina years.

The IMD is also anticipating the development of a positive Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD) or cooler-than-normal Indian Ocean in the east compared to the west, which helps bring rain to several states in southern India. The IOD is currently 'neutral' and is expected to turn positive by August.

Another factor is below-normal snow cover in the northern hemisphere and Eurasia. Historically, there has been an "inverse relationship" between the levels of snow here and the monsoon. (PTI)



## PORSCHÉ CAR CRASH

## 'Juvenile's blood sample changed to show no trace of alcohol'; 2 doctors held

**PUNE, May 27:** Pune Police investigating the Porsche car crash case on Monday said the blood samples of the juvenile driver were thrown into a dustbin and replaced with another person's samples which showed no traces of alcohol and arrested two doctors of the state-run Sassoon General Hospital.

Another person was also arrested for his alleged links with Dr Ajay Taware, head of the Sassoon Hospital's Forensic Medicine department and Dr Shrihari Halnor, the chief medical officer of the state-run hospital.

"The juvenile's father had called the doctor and offered him allurements to replace the blood samples," Pune Police Commissioner Amitesh Kumar said at a press conference here on Monday.

As the juvenile's blood samples were replaced, the report which was received on Sunday from the hospital showed no traces of alcohol, he said.

Two IT professionals were killed after their motorcycle was hit by a speeding Porsche allegedly driven by the minor boy in the early hours of May 19 in Kalyani Nagar area of Pune city. The police claim the teenager was drunk at the time of the accident.

In separate developments, a court allowed the police to take custody of Vishal Agarwal, the realtor father of the 17-year-old involved in the car crash, from the Yerwada Central Jail in connection with the case of kidnapping and wrongful confinement of his driver.

A team of representatives from Porsche reached the Yerwada police station on Monday to conduct a technical inspection of the luxury car involved in the crash, an official said.

"Dr Ajay Taware and Dr Shrihari Halnor have been arrested. The investigation revealed that the blood samples of the juvenile were replaced with some other person's samples and this was done on the direction of Dr Taware," said Amitesh Kumar.

On the instructions of Dr Taware, the juvenile's blood samples were thrown into a dustbin and replaced with the blood samples of another person, he said.

"The investigation also revealed that it was the juvenile's father who had called Dr Ajay Taware and offered him allurements to replace the blood samples," Kumar said.

Another police official from the crime branch told PTI that the juvenile's father made multiple calls to Dr Taware.

Kumar said the manipulation of the blood sample came to light after another sample of the juvenile taken for DNA sampling was sent to another hospital.

"The report of the other hospital revealed the juvenile's blood report at the Sassoon Hospital was manipulated as the DNA of (blood samples of) both the reports did not match," he said.

He said a probe is underway to find out whose blood samples were collected to replace those of the juvenile and CCTV footage of the Sassoon Hospital was recovered.

The police commissioner also said that Indian Penal sections 201 (causing disappearance of evidence of offence), 120 B (criminal conspiracy) and other relevant sections have been added to the case in which the juvenile has been booked.

"We have made the juvenile's father co-accused in the present case," he said.

A police officer said the court allowed the police to take custody of Vishal Agarwal from the Yerwada Central Jail in connection with the case of kidnapping and wrongful confinement of his driver.

Agarwal is in judicial custody in a case registered against him and the managers and owners of two pubs under the Juvenile Justice Act and is lodged in the central jail.

"The court has allowed the application for the production warrant of the juvenile's father, and he will be taken into custody from the jail," said a police officer from Pune police.

The police had registered a case against Vishal Agarwal and his father, Surendra Agarwal, for the 'illegal confinement' of their driver and arrested them.

According to police, the father and grandfather put pressure on the family's driver to take the blame for the accident by offering him money and giving him threats.

Meanwhile, a team of representatives from Porsche conducted a technical inspection of the vehicle along with officials from the regional transport office, said Sanjiv Bhor, the regional transport officer.

Maharashtra Transport Commissioner Vivek Bhimanwar had earlier said the car was imported in March by a dealer in Bengaluru, and from there, it was sent to Maharashtra on a temporary registration. (PTI)

## Cyclone Remal: 1 dead, 2 injured in Kolkata; Metro services, traffic disrupted

**KOLKATA, May 27:** One person died and two others were injured in Kolkata following heavy rain triggered by Cyclone Remal that pummelled the coasts of West Bengal and neighbouring Bangladesh with devastating wind speeds, officials said on Monday.

A man died of his injuries when a wall collapsed due to relentless downpour on Sunday at the Bibir Bagan area of Entally in central Kolkata, a state disaster management official said.

Two others suffered injuries in Maniktala area after the cyclone struck, though the exact cause is yet to be known, he said.

Kolkata recorded 150-mm rainfall in 24 hours till 8.30 am, while neighbouring Salt Lake received 110-mm rain during the period. Tarakeswar in Hooghly received the highest amount of rainfall in south Bengal at 300 mm, the Met office said.

Vehicular traffic movement was disrupted in several pockets of Kolkata since Monday morning, the first working day of the week, as trees lay uprooted and streets overflowed with water on account of the incessant rain the cyclonic system brought over the city.

Reports of uprooting of trees were received from Southern Avenue, Lake Place, Chetla, D L Khan Road, Dufferin



Road, Ballygunge Road, New Alipore, Behala, Jadavpur, Golpark, Hatibagan, Jagat Mukherjee Park and College Street, as well as the city's adjoining Salt Lake area, the officials said.

Around 68 trees were uprooted in Kolkata, and another 75 in nearby Salt Lake and Rajarhat area.

"Water-logging was reported from various places including Southern Avenue, Lake View Road, Pratapaditya Road, Tollygunge Phari, Alipore and Central Av-

enue, resulting in traffic diversion," a senior officer of Kolkata Traffic Police said.

Major arterial roads like Central Avenue and College Street in central Kolkata and pockets of Ballygunge, Dhakuria and Behala in the south continued to remain waterlogged during the later part of the day as well.

Meanwhile, train services in the Sealdah South section of Eastern Railway resumed at 9 am after remaining suspended for three hours in the morning, an ER of-

ficial said.

Flight services from the Kolkata airport also resumed on Monday morning after being suspended for 21 hours in view of the cyclone, a senior Airports Authority of India (AAI) official said.

Metro Railway services in the north-south corridor were disrupted in parts for four-and-a-half hours on Monday morning.

The services continued in a truncated manner between Dakshineswar-Girish Park stations and Kavi Subhash-Mahanayak Uttam Kumar stations (Tollygunj-New Garia) from 7:51 am to 12 pm, a Metro Railway spokesperson said.

The disruption occurred due to waterlogging on tracks in between Park Street and Esplanade stations.

Normal services over the entire stretch of Dakshineswar-New Garia (Kavi Subhas), called the 'Blue Line', resumed from 12:05 pm, the official said.

Kolkata Mayor Firhad Hakim said the municipal corporation was trying to address the situation on war footing.

"The situation is not that worse compared to what it was when Cyclone Amphan hit. The trees are being removed to make way for traffic. The drainage pumps are also operating at full strength," Hakim told PTI.

Salt Lake Mayor Krishna Chakraborty

said the uprooted trees have been removed and roads are clear for traffic movement.

The Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port in Kolkata, which suspended all cargo and container handling operations in the wake of Cyclone Remal, began returning to normal on Monday and ship navigation is expected to commence in the evening, a top official said.

"There was no major impact of the cyclone on the port infrastructure in both Kolkata and Haldia docks except for some uprooted trees causing disruptions. The port will begin operations from 2 pm onwards, and navigation of ships is also expected to resume from the evening," Chairman Rathendra Raman told PTI.

The port had halted operations from 6 pm on May 26 to 6 am on May 27 in view of the cyclone.

Meanwhile, Governor C V Ananda Bose said in a message issued by the Raj Bhavan: "We are all greatly relieved that no reported casualty is there. Cyclone Remal is weakening. The people of Bengal are able to brave it with courage. We are keeping a watch on the situation. If there is any need, Raj Bhavan's doors are open for all."

Bose has also constituted a task force at the Raj Bhavan. (PTI)

## Game zone fire: Gujarat HC raps Rajkot civic body, says it doesn't have faith in state machinery



**AHMEDABAD, May 27:** The Gujarat High Court on Monday said it does not have faith in the state machinery "which gets into action only after innocent lives are lost", as it pulled up the Rajkot civic body over the purported lapses in functioning of the game zone facility where a massive fire killed 27 persons. A special bench of Justices Biren Vaishnav and Devan Desai asked whether the civic body sat over the fire safety orders passed earlier on a PIL for 18 months.

The HC was hearing a suo motu PIL on the TRP game zone fire tragedy which occurred on May 25. A day earlier, the HC termed the incident a prima facie "man-made disaster".

The bench asked whether the civic body had turned a blind eye to such a big structure coming up in its vicinity after its lawyer submitted that the TRP Game Zone had not asked for requisite permissions. The bench noted that all commissioners of the Rajkot municipal corporation from the time the TRP game zone was set up in 2021 till the time of this incident (on May 25) "should be held accountable for the tragedy that occurred," and directed them to furnish separate affidavits. On Monday, a counsel pointed out the state government will have to come forward to hold a person accountable, and this calls for drastic steps.

"Who will take such drastic steps? Honestly speaking, we do not have faith in the state machinery now. Four years after orders of this court, directing them, after their assurance, this is the sixth incident that has happened. They only want lives to be lost and then trigger the machinery," the bench said. To the RMC counsel's submission that the game zone had not applied for requisite permissions, the HC asked whether the civic body was blind to such a big structure having come up under its jurisdiction.

"You were blind to that...this big structure existed, you were not aware of it? What is the corporation's explanation that the whole zone existed for the last two-and-a-half years? What fire safety did they apply for? When ticketing was done, were you aware of the entertainment tax? So we take it that you are completely turning a blind eye to the whole issue?," the bench asked.

The HC also wanted to know as to when the

corporation first recognised the existence of the game zone. "Till then you were completely ignorant of such a structure in the vicinity? Were you not aware of the orders of this court for fire safety (passed) in a PIL? What were you doing then? There are media reports that your municipal commissioner went there at the time of the inauguration. We can't take judicial notice of that fact? For 18 months, what did the corporation do? Sat over it?" the bench asked.

The court noted the game zone was conceptualised in 2021 and continued to operate till May 5, 2024, for over a period of three years, admitted without a fire NOC or any other requisite permissions. On May 9, 2024, the corporation wrote to the owners to furnish fire NOC, it stated in the order. The question is "inaction of the authorities in even inspecting the site in light of the regulations," it said and questioned why the civic body didn't inquire about the legality of the structures for 3 years since June 2021.

"On the date when the incident occurred, the game zone did not have NOCs or structural stability certificate, and it was merrily going on in front of the corporation," the bench stated.

Owners of the TRP Game Zone created a fabricated steel frame structure with the boundaries of steel patras, the HC said. It did not have a fire NOC and structural stability certificate, and was asked to provide the same in order to get the benefit of regularisation, the court noted.

"The facts itself are eloquent, therefore, to indicate that the game zone at Rajkot was conceptualised, set up and continued to operate under the very nose of the corporation's officials without the requisite permissions," it observed in its order.

We refrain at this stage from passing any orders, though we would certainly desire to, to suggest that the officers in question be suspended for dereliction of duty and non-compliance with the direction of this court. We do not do so with the hope to give them a chance, the bench added.

The bench said the structures set up by the game zone operator cannot be branded as "temporary structures." The bench stated even the police department has "a lot to answer" for allowing the game zone to operate in the vicinity of a local police station with fire NOC permission and directed the Rajkot Police Commissioner to file an affidavit.

The bench noted that the AMC, SMC, and VMC swung into action "in a typical knee-jerk reaction" after the Rajkot incident and inspected such entertainment zones. "It was most unfortunate that they acted only after the death of innocent children and young ones," the bench stated.

The HC asked whether the SIT formed by the state will "sufficiently assuage the sentiments of the families who have repeatedly lost their kith and kin in these tragedies which have obviously been man-made." (PTI)

## Fire deaths up by 30pc till May as compared to 2023: Official data

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Fire has taken 55 lives and injured more than 300 people in the national capital so far this year, according to the official data revealed on Monday. According to the data by Delhi Fire Services (DFS), 16 people were killed in fire in January, another 16 in February, 12 in March, four in April, and seven till May 26.

Fire incidents led to 51 injuries in January, 42 in February, 62 in March, 78 in April, and 71 till May 26.

From January 1 to May 26, the DFS received 8,912 fire-related calls. According to the data, 36 people had lost their lives during the same period in 2023.

"The number of fire calls increased to 32.26 per cent this year. According to the data, a total 6,436 calls related to the fire were received from January 1 to May 26, last year, but this year the number has gone up by more than 32 per cent with 8,912 fire related calls during the same period," an official of the Delhi Fire Services said.

"Last year 36 people had lost their lives, this year total 55 people have so far lost their lives," the official added.

On Sunday, six newborn died after a massive fire broke out at a private children's hospital in east Delhi's Vivek Vihar. The blaze broke out at the Baby Care New Born Hospital at around 11.30 pm on Saturday and soon spread to two other adjacent buildings.

Sixteen fire tenders were pressed into service to douse the blaze and a massive rescue operation was launched. Of the 13 children taken out from the hospital, six were declared dead. Police had said that one child had already died before the fire broke out.

DFS chief Atul Garg told PTI Videos, "The neonatal

hospital has no fire NOC and has not even proper fire combat arrangements. Besides that, oxygen cylinders were also kept there which had exploded."

"Be it NOC required or not, everyone must ensure proper fire safety arrangements in all types of buildings. Installing sprinklers is one of the best ways to combat fire initially and to inform firefighters," he said.

The incident also drew the attention of President Droupadi Murmu, who prayed for the babies and consoled with the bereaved parents.

Police on Sunday arrested the owner of the hospital which was being operated with an expired licence. It also did not have qualified doctors and had no clearance from the fire department.

On the same day, three people died in a fire in a four-storey residential building in Krishna Nagar area of east Delhi. On February 15, 11 people died in an explosion and subsequent blaze in a paint factory at Dayalpur market in outer Delhi's Alipur. Four people were injured in the incident. The charred bodies of the 11 victims, one of them a woman, were recovered from the factory, which doubled as a chemical godown.

The fire, which was preceded by a blast, had spread to nearby buildings, including a drug rehabilitation centre and eight shops.

In another incident in February, an 83-year-old woman died and her granddaughter sustained injuries after they jumped off the fourth floor of a residential building in southwest Delhi's Dwarka when a fire broke out in their apartment. (PTI)

## When followers of any sect deviate from spiritual path, they become victims of fanaticism: Murmu

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Asserting that spiritual empowerment is the real empowerment, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday said when the followers of any religion or sect deviate from the path of spirituality, they become victims of fanaticism and suffer from an unhealthy mentality.

"Spiritual values ??connect people of all religions to each other," she said, addressing the national launch of 'Spiritual Empowerment for a Clean and Healthy Society' organised by Brahma Kumaris here.

The president said the forces promoting fear, terror, and war are very active in many parts of the world.

"In such an environment, Brahma Kumari Institution has provided an effective platform for the empowerment of humanity through many centres in more than 100 countries. This is an invaluable effort to strengthen universal brotherhood by promoting spiritual values," Murmu said.

The president said the golden chapters of world history and the history of nations have always been

based on spiritual values.

"World history is witness to the fact that disregarding spiritual values ??and adopting only the path of material progress has ultimately proved disastrous. Holistic well-being is possible only on the basis of a healthy mentality," she said.

Murmu said a truly healthy person meets all three dimensions -- physical, mental and spiritual. Such individuals create a healthy society, nation and world community, she added.

The president said spiritual empowerment is real empowerment.

"When the followers of any religion or sect deviate from the path of spirituality, they become victims of fanaticism and suffer from unhealthy mentality," Murmu was quoted as having said in a statement issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

The president said working with the spirit of public welfare while rising above selfishness is a social expression of inner spirituality.

"Doing charity for the public good is one of the most important spiritual values," she said. (PTI)

## Expect relief from heat wave after three days: IMD

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Northwest and central parts of the country are likely to get some relief from scorching heat after three days due to a fresh western disturbance, the India Meteorological Department said on Monday.

According to IMD chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Rajasthan and Gujarat saw nine to 12 heat wave days, with temperatures reaching 45-50 degrees Celsius.

"Expect relief from the heat wave in northwest and central parts of the country after three days due to a western disturbance and moisture incursion from the Arabian Sea. There could be some thunderstorm activity in northwest India and rain in the western Himalayan region," Mohapatra said in a virtual press conference.

Delhi, south Haryana, southwest UP and Punjab recorded five-seven heat wave days, with maximum temperatures ranging from 44 degrees Celsius to 48 degrees Celsius, he said. Assam also experienced a heat wave with record breaking temperatures on May 25-26. (PTI)

## Studies link widely used diabetes, weight-loss meds with increased risk of stomach paralysis

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Popular diabetes and weight loss medications like Ozempic and Wegovy have been linked with an increased risk of developing stomach paralysis, new studies have found.

Stomach paralysis, also known as gastroparesis, weakens the stomach muscles, leading to food sitting in the main digestive organ for long.

Wegovy is approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for weight management, while Ozempic is an approved medication helping patients with type 2 diabetes manage blood sugar levels.

However, Ozempic is sometimes prescribed for weight loss, even though it is not FDA-approved for this purpose. Both Wegovy and Ozempic are injections containing the protein semaglutide, which is similar to the hormone glucagon-like peptide-1 (GLP-1).

Released in the body in response to meal intake, GLP-1's main actions include promoting the production of insulin.

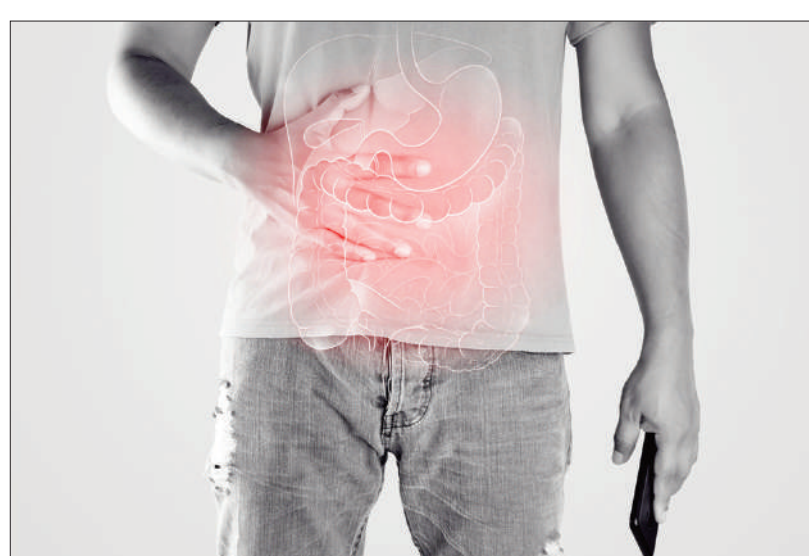
While these anti-diabetic and weight loss medications, known as GLP-1 receptor agonists or GLP-1 analogues, are known to cause gastrointestinal (GI) side effects such as nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea, new studies shows less common ones such as stomach paralysis (gastroparesis), ileus and acute pancreatitis to be occurring as well.

The studies were presented at Digestive Disease Week 2024, a conference conducted from May 18-21 in Washington DC, US.

One of these studies conducted by researchers, including those from the University of Kansas, identified 1.85 lakh patients with diabetes or obesity who were prescribed GLP-1 analogues between December 1, 2021, and November 30, 2022.

About 0.53 per cent of the patients were found to develop gastroparesis, with the research team estimating that the risk of having the condition increased by 66 per cent.

Cholecystitis (inflammation of the gall bladder) was observed in 0.55 per cent



of the patients, with the risk of developing the condition estimated to increase by 28 per cent.

The study's authors also found that 0.04 per cent of the GLP-1 analog-pre-

scribed patients developed drug-induced pancreatitis, and estimated the risk of experiencing the condition to go up by more than 350 per cent.

They also found that 9 per cent of the

patients had a significantly higher incidence of nausea and vomiting, while 7.5 per cent of them showed a higher incidence of gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GERD), a condition in which the stomach contents move up the food pipe, or the oesophagus.

The results showed that "the use of GLP-1 agonists in patients with diabetes mellitus and obesity is associated with GI side effects, including nausea, vomiting, gastroparesis, GERD, esophagitis, drug-induced pancreatitis, cholecystitis and need for upper-endoscopy," the authors wrote in the study, currently available as an abstract.

The second study assessed the risk of gastroparesis in patients with type 2 diabetes treated with GLP-1 receptor agonists (RA). More than 3.36 lakh patients were included in each of the two cohorts -- one receiving the medication and the other not.

"Patients with T2D prescribed GLP-1 RAs had an increased risk of GP at 6, 9, 12, 18 and at 24 months. The odds ratio for gastroparesis significantly increased

after 6 months through 24 months after controlling for different risk factors," the authors, including those from Cleveland Clinic, Ohio, wrote in the abstract of the study. Both the studies used data from the multi-institutional database, TriNetX.

The third study, conducted by researchers at Mayo Clinic Minnesota, assessed the impact of GLP-1 RA on GI symptoms. Data of nearly 80,000 patients from the Mayo Clinic Platform who were prescribed the medication were included for this analysis.

The researchers found that nearly 14,660, or 18 per cent, of these patients developed at least one new GI symptom suggestive of gastroparesis. About 700 of the 14,660 patients underwent gastric emptying scintigraphy (GES), which helps in assessing the stomach's ability to empty.

The team found that about a third of this group experienced gastroparesis.

"These real-world data suggest that GI symptoms are prevalent in those treated with GLP-1 RA," the authors wrote in the study's abstract. (PTI)



## BIPASHA BASU TO PEN BOOK ON LIFE JOURNEY, SELF-DISCOVERY



**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Actor Bipasha Basu will soon turn author as she pens a personal account of episodes that have shaped her life and also explores themes of self-discovery, resilience and the pursuit of inner peace.

The part-memoir and part self-help book by the now-wellness advocate and entrepreneur will have anecdotes, reflections and illustrations as she elaborates why she chose happiness as a life pursuit.

Basu said her life has been challenging and blessed in equal measure and she is looking forward to "this new chapter in my life". "But what has got me through and this far is a conscious decision to focus on the bright side of life and to choose sunshine - every day! I felt it's time to share my learnings with my fans and readers. I am delighted I have found an enterprising team in The Sunflower Seeds and LAP Ventures who will be working closely with me on making this dream come true," she said. The book is scheduled for release next year. Commenting on the acquisition, Pallavi Barman, founder of LAP Ventures, said Bipasha and her ideologies have always been progressive and ahead of her time, breaking the conventions and ruling the roost.

"She is a fitness enthusiast like none other who embraced it at a time when it was still in early stages of adoption as far as the leading ladies of Indian cinema was concerned," she said. "It has always been a delight to represent her interests strategize with her and learn from her on this subject and after a series of successful DIY workout DVDs - Love Yourself, we can't wait to capture and showcase this cornucopia of her journey as she navigates through motherhood, all set to share her paradigm shifting perspective on overall well-being and happiness," she added.

Preeti Chaturvedi, founder and CEO of The Sunflower Seeds, said the concept of the book is very earnest and unique and hoped it will strike a chord with the readers. "Bipasha is easily one of the most loved actors and wellness icons of this country. It is a huge privilege for us to be her partners in this literary journey," she said. (PTI)

## Best year yet for Indian filmmakers with three wins at Cannes 2024

**CANNES, May 27:** It was a triple feat for Indian talent at the 2024 Cannes Film Festival with Payal Kapadia's "All We Imagine As Light", "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know" by FTII student Chandananda S Naik, and Anasuya Sengupta of "The Shameless" fame winning major awards in each of the three competitive sections of the prestigious gala.

The 77th edition of Cannes, which concluded on Saturday, was undoubtedly the best year for the country which found space at the fest through eight Indian, or India-themed, films.

Kapadia, an alumna of the Film & Television Institute of India (FTII), charted history by becoming the first Indian filmmaker to win the Grand Prix award for "All We Imagine as Light".

"Thank you, Cannes Film Festival for having our film here. Please don't wait 30 years to have another Indian film," she said in her speech.

The movie earned the honour, the second-most prestigious prize of the gala after the Palme d'Or, which went to American director Sean Baker for "Anora".

"All We Imagine as Light", a Malayalam-Hindi feature starring Kani Kusruti, Divya Prabha and Chhaya Kadam, revolves around three women in Mumbai who go on a road trip to a beach town. Kapadia's movie, her feature directorial debut, is the first Indian film in 30 years and first ever by an Indian female director to be showcased in main competition, last being Shaji N Karun's "Swaham" (1994).

That "All We Imagine as Light" will win an award became almost certain when it received glowing reviews following its premiere, with some international critics describing it as a "portrait of urban connection" and "poetic meditation" as well as comparing Kapadia's work to that of masters like Satyajit Ray and Wong Kar Wai.

Though the second most prestigious prize at Cannes, Grand Prix has a storied history with prominent titles

including this year's Oscar winner "The Zone of Interest" and Park Chan-wook's revenge drama "Oldboy" as part of the list.

"All We Imagine as Light" has already found distributors for its North America release, but it's unclear when the film will be screened in India.

Writer-lyricist Varun Grover said it was an "unbelievable day" for Indian cinema.

"Dissent, in art and in life, is a tough path to choose. But sometimes it does create magic," he wrote on X.

Kapadia, who led a student protest against the appointment of actor-politician Gajendra Chauhan as FTII chairman, had won the Oeil d'or (Golden Eye) award at Cannes for acclaimed documentary "A Night of Knowing Nothing" which premiered under Director's Fortnight section in 2021.

Her 2017 short film "Afternoon Clouds" opened at Cannes under Cinefondation category, dedicated to supporting the next generation of talented filmmakers.

Actor Richa Chadha called Kapadia's win historic.

"Wow!! What an incredible achievement for Indian cinema! Take a bow," said

Malayalam star Tovino Thomas.

That's not all. Production designer Sengupta, who starred in a key featuring role in Bulgarian director Konstantin Bojanov's "The Shameless", became the first Indian to win the best actress prize in Un Certain Regard. "The Shameless" explores a dark world of exploitation and misery in which two sex workers forge a bond.

Sengupta dedicated her win "to the queer community and other marginalised communities".

"You don't have to be queer to fight for equality, you don't have to be colonised to know that colonising is pathetic — we just need to be decent human beings," she said. Actor Tillotama Shome shared Sengupta's speech on Instagram.

"She brought it HOME. Listen to her words. Till the end. The quality of her voice. Ink this in your hearts. For all the dreamers..."

British-Indian director Sandhya Suri's "Santosh", also part of Un Certain Regard, didn't win any award but being featured at Cannes is an achievement in itself. Neeraj Ghaywan's "Masaan" previously won two awards—

FIPRESCI, Inter-

national Jury of Film Critics prize and Promising Future prize in the section. Naik's "Sunflowers Were the First Ones to Know...", which won the La Cinef first prize (film

school fiction or animated films), was another feather in FTII's cap.(PTI)



## Siddhant Chaturvedi, Triptii Dimri to star in 'Dhadak 2'



**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Actors Siddhant Chaturvedi and Triptii Dimri are set to star in Dhadak 2, production house Dharma Productions announced on Monday.

The movie is directed by Shazia Iqbal, known for her acclaimed short film Bebaak and Prime Video series Love Storyaan.

Dhadak 2 will hit the screens on November 22. Dharma Productions made the announcement on its official X page.

"Kaise milenge - aag aur paani? Presenting Dhadak 2 starring Siddhant Chaturvedi & Triptii Dimri. Directed by Shazia Iqbal.

#Dhadak2 in cinemas 22nd November 2024," the banner captioned the motion poster of the film.

According to a press release, Dhadak 2 is a 'compelling story that explores love and challenges social norms'.

In 2018, Dharma Productions released Dhadak, starring Jahnvi Kapoor and Ishaan Khatter.

The upcoming film is also produced by Zee Studios and Cloud 9 Pictures. (PTI)

## FROM BARNAWA VILLAGE TO CANNES: DESIGNER NANCY TYAGI IS TOAST OF FASHION WORLD

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Who is Nancy Tyagi? That is suddenly an oft-asked question -- and not just in the world of high fashion -- with the young woman who stitched her own clothes and modelled them too in the Cannes film festival the new toast of the glamour world for her dramatic rise to fame.

The famed red carpet at the French Riviera town is a far cry from the streets of her village Barnawa in Uttar Pradesh and the 23-year-old has seen her Instagram following jump from seven lakh to two million in just a matter of days. Trending on social media and making headlines in the mainstream press, Tyagi has the likes of actor Sonam Kapoor asking her to design for them.

Cannes almost didn't happen, said Tyagi, who came to Delhi in 2020 to

prepare for the civil services but couldn't go through with it because of financial constraints.

Invited as a fashion influencer, she was initially just too scared and refused to go.

"But my team convinced me and when I went there, it felt like it was the best decision of my life. Even until I was in the car by the red carpet, I was scared. But as soon as I stepped out, I felt totally different," Tyagi told PTI in an interview.

"I gave many poses. They went viral and the audience loved it. I am very grateful for them. I don't have words to thank them for their love and support. I felt very nice, and also that I was one of the influencers who were in Cannes is amazing. And I'm happy that our country is progressing," said the young designer who turned heads

at the recently concluded 77th edition of the film festival.

Overwhelmed by the attention, she said she now wants to make a costume for Kapoor. The actor, known for her versatile fashion choices, praised Tyagi's Cannes outfits and even shared an Instagram story asking when she would make an ensemble for her.

"Sonam Kapoor first posted my video in her Instagram story and later she also loved both of my Cannes looks, but she loved the saree look the most. She asked me to make her an outfit too in her Instagram story. It's a huge thing for me that a fashion diva like her has asked me. I will definitely make an outfit for her in the future," Tyagi said.

Till a week ago, not many had heard of Nancy Tyagi. Then she grabbed the attention of shutterbugs with her out-

fits, competing for attention with the who's who of the global showbiz and glamour world. And there is seemingly no looking back.

Besides her followers on her Instagram account, which is filled with her impressive DIY skills videos and clips of creating outfits from scratch, she also has a million followers on YouTube.

For her Cannes foray, Tyagi designed four garments, which took her two months to put together. She created her first look, a beautiful 20 kg pink gown with frills and made with 1,000 metres of fabric, in 30 days. In the month that followed, she made the other three.

"For my first Cannes look, I thought of making the outfit in orange or black. I dropped the idea to make it in black because all the photographers

there wear black and it would seem that I am one of them. And for orange, I thought it won't look good in summers."

"But I didn't know that it would be cold in France. So I chose the colour pink and I looked like a doll in it. And (her younger brother) Manu also told me to choose pink. I made four outfits which took me two months to make. I worked on the first look, the pink gown, single-handed and it took me one month... It was difficult," she said.

For the second look, she wore an intricate hand-embroidered lavender saree with a full-sleeve and backless blouse and a matching veil and a long train. "When I got to know that I am going to Cannes, the first thought that crossed my mind was what to make and how. So, I thought that because I am going from India, saree must be

one of my outfits. I gave my saree a western touch and the audience liked it a lot. It was my best decision to wear a saree and I think people loved it even more than my first outfit," she said.

Her third look at the gala, which ran through May 14-May 25, was an all-black ensemble comprising a corset, a tailed skirt and a stole.

Tyagi also revealed her fourth Cannes outfit -- a white and blue printed pant-suit -- was made out of sustainable fabric.

"I made this look from sustainable fabric and it's 100 per cent organic cotton. I will create more looks that will be made from sustainable fabric. I kept this outfit quite simple. I didn't give it much of that red carpet vibe. I will also be posting this on my Instagram, this is my fourth look at Cannes." (PTI)



# Indian shuttlers eye productive outing at Singapore Open



**SINGAPORE, May 27:** Top Indian shuttlers, including PV Sindhu, HS Prannoy and Lakshya Sen, will look to hit top gear at the USD 850,000 Singapore Open, beginning here on Tuesday, with an additional objective of fine-tuning their preparations for the Paris Olympics. The Summer Games are just two months away and the Olympic-bound shuttlers

will have three more tournaments -- Australian Open super 500, Indonesia Super 1000, Canada Open super 500 -- to hone their skills and shake off any cobwebs ahead of the quadrennial mega event.

Recently-crowned Thailand Open champions Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty have looked in the best shape for the Olympics, while Sindhu

too has geared up with a runner-up finish at the Malaysia Masters on Sunday.

Lakshya and Prannoy will also hope for a deep run into the event to receive the ideal boost in the build-up to the Paris Games.

However, it will be a tough test of their temperament as some big guns stand in their way in the Super 750 tournament.

loss as bigger battles lie ahead for her this week. She opens her campaign against Denmark's Line Hojmark Kjaersfeldt. A win is likely to pit her against Rio Olympic champion Carolina Marin of Spain.

Satwik and Chirag regained their world no. 1 status after sailing through in Bangkok without dropping a game but the duo is likely to be tested this week. The Indian pair have been in the form of their lives with four final appearances so far this season and they will look to continue the good run when they open against Denmark's Daniel Lundgaard and Mads Vestergaard in men's doubles competition.

In men's singles, Lakshya had sneaked into the Olympic qualification with two back-to-back semifinal finishes at French Open and All England Championships. The youngster is coming off a break and will face the tall task of taming world no. 1 Viktor Axelsen, who won the Malaysia Masters on Sunday.

Eighth seed Prannoy, who is recovering from a health issue, had a forgettable outing in his last tournament when he was ousted by compatriot Meiraba Luwang Maisnam in the opening round of Thailand Open.

Prannoy, a world championships and Asian Games bronze medalist, will have to find his best footing when he opens against Belgium's Julien Carraggi. (PTI)

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## From setbacks to success: Shreyas Iyer's journey to IPL victory

**KOLKATA, May 27:** When Shreyas Iyer recreated Lionel Messi's famous World Cup celebration after lifting the IPL Trophy as Kolkata Knight Riders captain in Chennai, it was nothing short of an Argentina moment for the embattled Indian cricketer at an individual level.

His central contract torn up a few weeks before the IPL besides a recurring back injury threatening to derail him, Iyer faced numerous challenges at the start of the year.

He finally found a deep sense of triumph and vindication in this victory, much like Messi did after exorcising the ghosts of losing the 2014 final and winning the trophy for his country after a 36-year wait. For the two-time IPL champions, the wait lasted 10 years as Iyer sang a redemption song following a topsy-turvy start to the year. Little wonder then that he chose to imitate the man who knows all about rising from setbacks. So, Iyer, with the trophy in his hands, took a playful walk towards his teammates, quite similar to what Messi did after the final against France in Doha, and handed the big prize to them.

"I am hearing a lot about Gautam Gambhir, who has created a magnificent culture in the KKR team. But this guy (Iyer), I don't think he is getting enough credit. Shreyas Iyer needs some credit," said the legendary Ian Bishop on Sunday as KKR defeated Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets in a completely one-sided final to win their third IPL title.

KKR may have got most of their runs from openers Sunil Narine and Phil Salt, but they played as a team and managed to come out winners in a dominant season, topping the table with two rounds to spare, and enduring just three losses in between.

"It is hard to express how we are feeling right now. The wait was so long. We played like invincibles throughout the season. There is so much to cherish right now," said Iyer.

It was a special feeling for his

childhood and Mumbai coach Pravin Amre, who first tested his character by promoting Iyer to No.3 from No.7 in his maiden Ranji season in 2014-15.

Iyer returned with 153, his maiden first-class hundred in their match against Bengal at Eden Gardens in December 2014.

"I challenged him in his entire career (in Mumbai)...I knew how strong-willed he's and it was my job as a coach to challenge him. He always liked to take the challenge in a good stride, he is a good team man. In the last world cup, he scored 530 runs," Amre said.

"I always told him you just do whatever is in your hands, let the other people do their job, you just remain focus on what's in your hands," added Amre who first took him under his wings at the Shivaji Park Gymkhana.

By leading KKR into final, Iyer achieved the rare feat of playing the summit clash as captain of two different franchises in the IPL. The KKR skipper missed the last season because of a back injury that required a surgery in London last year. He made a comeback in the Asia Cup and went on to become India's third leading run-getter after Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma in the last year's ODI World Cup.

The year didn't start well for him though as he had a difficult outing in the home Test series against England and looked patchy scoring 140 runs in the first two matches before being left out for the final three Tests.

It was learnt that he developed the recurring back problem, even though he was cleared by the Board medical staff. Iyer then became the centre of a controversy when he missed the Ranji Trophy for his home state Mumbai and went on to attend KKR's pre-season camp.

Iyer, however, returned to play for Mumbai in the semifinal and final against Vidarbha where he scored a resolute 95 in the second innings of their 42nd Ranji triumph. (PTI)

## Atwal Tied-17 for best finish in a Senior Major; debutant Bland wins title

**BENTON HARBOR, May 27:** Indian golfer Arjun Atwal produced a solid four-under 67 on a weather-hit final day to sign off tied 17th at the Senior PGA Championship, his best finish in a Senior major. Richard Bland, 51, playing his first Senior event on Champions Tour, shot 8-under 63 on his debut for a three-shot victory at Harbor Shores Resort. Bland, who finished at 17-under 267, is now exempt for the U.S. Senior Open on June 27-30 at Newport Country Club in

Rhode Island. Atwal, who scored 69-75 on the first two days, had a great weekend as he finished with 68-67 for a total of 5-under. In the final round, Atwal had an eventful front nine with five birdies and two bogeys. Four of the five birdies came in the run from the second to the sixth hole and on the back nine he birdied 10th and the 15th and dropped a shot on 13th for a round of 67, his best for the week.

Last year Atwal played three Senior

Majors and made the cut at the Senior PGA (T-49) and was T-38 at Kaulig Co Championships and missed the cut at the Senior Open. The Senior PGA this year was his first in 2024 and the remaining ones are US Senior Open, the Kaulig Co Open and the Senior Open at Carnoustie.

Jeev Milkha Singh, however, missed the cut this week. As the final round was delayed by about an hour because of storms, Bland's winning shot may well have been his approach on par-5 15th. He

hit it to six feet for eagle. That took him from one shot behind Greg Chalmers to a one-shot lead and Chalmers could only manage a par. Bland won by three shots over Richard Green, who shot 65 and took second place alone without ever having a serious chance of winning. Bland got emotional during the presentation thinking about his brother, Heath, who was diagnosed with stomach cancer just over a year ago and learned last week he had cancer in the lungs. (PTI)

## FIH Pro League: Harmanpreet's hat-trick guides India to 5-4 win over Argentina

**ANTWERP (BELGIUM), May 27:** Captain Harmanpreet Singh led from the front with a sensational hat-trick as the Indian men's hockey team recorded a thrilling 5-4 win over Argentina in the FIH Hockey Pro League here.

Besides Harmanpreet (29', 50' and 52'), Arajiet Singh Hundal (7') and Gurjant Singh (18') also scored for India, while Federico Monja (3'), Nicolas Keenan (24'), Tadeo Marucci (54') and Lucas Martinez (57') were on target for Argentina on Sunday.

India made a good start, keeping the ball for most of the first quarter and came up with accurate passes to make their way into the Argentina striking circle. However, Argentina drew first blood when Federico found the back of the net from a close range to give them a 1-0 lead.

In response, India equalized quickly as Arajiet scored a brilliant field goal. India also earned a penalty corner but failed to capitalize on it as the first quarter ended 1-1.

India started the second quarter on a high note. The fast counter-attacking aggressive approach helped India extend their lead after Gurjant scored an excellent field goal.

India were slightly dodgy the next few minutes after scoring the goal as they gave up possession and were punished when Argentina broke into a quick counter,

making their way through the left flank.

It was Nicolas Keenan who drove into the Indian circle, beating the defenders to strike the ball into India's goal levelling the score at 2-2. However, India earned a PC with a minute remaining in the quarter and Harmanpreet made it 3-2 in India's favour.

The third quarter was entertaining with both teams displaying quick-fire hockey. India secured a penalty corner but couldn't convert it as Harmanpreet's shot was

blocked well by the Argentina goalkeeper. With both teams defence standing tall, the third quarter remained goalless.

India came out in top gear in the fourth quarter as they pushed Argentina to make errors, leading to a PC being awarded with 10 minutes remaining. The decision was changed to a penalty stroke and Harmanpreet's low powerful shot found the back of the net as India took a 4-2 lead.

Two minutes later, India were awarded another penalty stroke, which was again successfully converted by Harmanpreet.

Argentina pulled two goals back in quick succession as Tadeo and Lucas found the back of the net to set up an exciting finish to the game. The match ended with India winning 5-4.

India will next take on Germany on June 1. (PTI)

## Australia facing player shortage for T20 World Cup Warm-up games: Marsh

**MELBOURNE, May 27:** Australia is facing shortage of players and might be forced to use support staff as substitute fielders in the warm-up games of next month's T20 World Cup due to the low turnaround time between the IPL and the global showpiece. Australia are set to play two warm-up games against Namibia on Wednesday and the West Indies on Friday in Trinidad but they might have as few as eight players available for the two matches since most of them will take a break following their stint in the IPL playoffs.

"We're going to be undermanned. But it is a practice game. The guys who need to play will play as much as they can and we'll figure it out from there," captain Mitchell Marsh, who himself is not certain to play against Namibia as he is recovering from a hamstring injury, told cricket.com.au.

The IPL finals between Kolkata Knight Riders and Sunrisers Hyderabad concluded on Sunday night and three players - Travis Head, Pat Cummins and player of the match Mitchell Starc - were part of the two teams. Besides the trio, Cameron Green and Glenn Maxwell, who were part of the Royal Challengers Bengaluru, will only link up with the World Cup squad by the end of the week in Barbados,

while Marcus Stoinis, who played for Lucknow Super Giants, is expected to arrive in Trinidad only after the Namibia practice match.

Travelling reserves Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matt Short too are set to join after Australia's first match of the tournament proper which is against Oman on June 5. "It's important to be flexible. Guys who have been at the IPL have been playing a lot of cricket. We prioritised giving them a couple of days at home to see their families, refresh, and play the long game for this tournament," Marsh said.

"We will get our 15 (all together) eventually, but really im-

portant that we give them a break, even if it's just a couple of days at home, that's really important." According to ICC rules, players taking to the field in the warm-up games must be from the country they are representing.

It means, support staff like Andrew McDonald, Brad Hodge, George Bailey (all former international cricketers) and Andre Borovec (an ex-first grade wicketkeeper) might be required to run around in the field.

Marsh played just four IPL games for Delhi Capitals before flying out to Perth in April to consult CA's medical staff for his hamstring injury. He hasn't played since and is yet to resume

bowling. "I'm probably still a little while off (bowling) - I'll start bowling hopefully soon. Get through these practice games as a batter and then we'll ramp it up," said Marsh. "We're lucky that we've got so many options with the ball and so much talent with Stoin, Greeny. I'll bowl when I need to bowl. I thought (this injury) was a three-weeker. Now it's been seven (weeks). With tendons it's a little bit on feel."

"Once I was ruled out of the IPL, we certainly took our time. I'm exactly where I need to be with all the planning leading into the World Cup, I'll be ready to go." (PTI)

## T20 World Cup: Can cricket make inroads in baseball-loving America?

**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Cricket, a popular pastime in the United States in the mid 1800s, makes a big-ticket return to North American shores through the T20 World Cup but will it be able to leave an impression on the local audience that knows little to nothing about the gentleman's game?

Cricket globally is driven by India but the International Cricket Council sees huge potential in the American market and claims there are already 30 million fans that follow the game in the massive country.

The T20 showpiece is also seen as a major stepping stone to the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics, where cricket will make a comeback after 128 years when the big event kicks off on June 1.

A total of 16 games will be played across three venues -- New York, Dallas and Lauderdale -- with a majority of 55 matches scheduled in the Caribbean including the knock-outs.

Day three of the competition

will have South Africa and Sri Lanka battling it out in New York, where the first ever international cricket game was held between USA and Canada back in 1844.

It was a phase when the sport was played widely across America before a much faster alternative in Baseball gained prominence during the Civil War in the 1860s.

"... (T20) it's entertainment and that's what people look for. That's what Americans look for, you know, they want entertainment," says legendary West Indian Brian Lara, one of the most recognisable cricketers in the world but someone who admits that he could walk around Miami without getting a second look.

"You know, you speak to an American and I've done that many times and they'd say 'you play a game for five days and then you end up in a draw? What's that all about?' So it's, it is difficult," he explains the challenge of selling Test cricket to an

American, who might just warm up to the shortest format though.

A couple of weeks of international cricket in an alien land will not be enough to evoke long-lasting interest from the local audience and to ensure the game grows beyond the South Asian and Caribbean expat community, the stakeholders will need more time. For a beginner, cricket can be rather complex to understand especially when one is introduced to "third man", "fine leg" or "deep mid-wicket", some of the terms used for the many field placements in the game.

The ICC is pulling out all stops to engage with the American audience, whether it is getting eight-time Olympic gold-winning sprinter Usain Bolt on board as the World Cup ambassador or promoting the event at the recent Formula 1 race in Miami.

To distract the average American household from the world of baseball, NFL and NBA, cricket will need to grow at the grassroots level.

"I surely think the game can grow in the USA. When you have presence in a country people start gravitating towards it and want to know more about," Bolt, who belongs to the cricket-loving Caribbean, told PTI in a recent interview.

The Americans have surely one reason to follow the event. Their team, mainly made up of players from South Asian and Caribbean heritage, will be making its World Cup debut.

Venu Pisike, head of USA Cricket, reckons the ICC event will bring much-needed awareness around the game but eventually, it is the lure of taking part in the 2028 Olympics that will draw masses to the sport.

"So far, cricket is predominantly an expats' game, but with the marketing and promotion activities during the World Cup, there is some momentum and the World Cup will definitely boost the opportunities to expand the game in the USA," said Pisike.

"Definitely, the World Cup is

bringing a lot of awareness and then the opportunity for cricket to be in the Olympics, that will definitely attract the community because the US is a huge sports country.

"Olympics is the prime area where all the sports bodies are focusing on since cricket is going to Olympics, that will actually give more opportunities to expand the sport between the World Cup and the Olympics," added Pisike.

The USA squad picked for the tournament makes up for a bunch of semi-professionals who rely on full-time jobs to run their families. That will have to change if the sport is to appeal to a broader audience in America, believes India-born USA squad member Nisarg Patel.

"Ultimately what needs to change in the USA is that an American kid in a high school needs to see a future in the game. There are so many sports in America, the country is built on Olympic medals. (PTI)



# I will also be lifting the World Cup: Rinku Singh

**CHENNAI, May 27:** "You guys watch, I will also be lifting the World Cup," an ecstatic Rinku Singh said after clinching the IPL with Kolkata Knight Riders here, looking forward to the T20 show-piece in the Americas where he will be among the reserves for Team India.

Kolkata Knight Riders won their third IPL title by trouncing former champions Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets in the final here on Sunday night.

The team's batting order, both top and middle, was in form throughout the event, including Rinku. Although the 26-year-old batted in only 11 innings, he was effective with 168 runs at a strike rate of 148.67.

"I am headed to Noida first, and then, I will be going to the United States of America. You guys watch, I will also be lifting the World Cup," Rinku told 'Jio Cinema'.

Rinku's omission from India's World Cup squad was a talking point after its announcement last month. He is among the four reserves, including star batter Shub-



man Gill.

Talking about KKR's performance this season, Rinku credited the entire unit and also lauded team mentor Gautam Gambhir, who returned to the side after seven years.

"You can't credit just one person because everyone has worked

hard. Since GG (Gautam Gambhir) sir came, a lot of things have changed. Sending Sunil early, he batted so well," Rinku said.

"The batters played well, and the bowling was great. Venky (Venkatesh Iyer) has been batting really well for the last five-six matches, so overall, everyone has

done really well," he added.

Speaking to the same channel's newly-launched show 'Dhawan Kareng'e' with Shikhar Dhawan, Indian wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant recounted how his cricket-loving father gifted him an expensive bat, leaving his mother livid.

Pant returned to professional cricket during the just-concluded Indian Premier League. He was out of action since December 2022 after suffering a horrific car accident on the Delhi-Dehradun highway.

"It was my father's dream to become a cricketer, and I am glad I could fulfil it. I decided I wanted to be a cricketer when I was in the 5th grade. My dad gifted me a bat worth ₹ 14,000, and my mom got super angry," he said.

Pant had a great season in IPL 2024 with Delhi Capitals, finishing as the side's highest run-scorer with 446 runs in 13 games at a strike rate of 155.40, including three half-centuries.

However, he could only lead the team to a sixth-place finish. (PTI)

# Starc produced ball of the IPL, Narine best player for KKR: Hayden



**CHENNAI, May 27:** Former Australia batter Matthew Hayden has termed Mitchell Starc's outstanding away-swing to Abhishek Sharma in the IPL final as the "ball of the IPL" while describing Sunil Narine as the "best player" for triumphant Kolkata Knight Riders.

Shreyas Iyer's rampant KKR, who were unstoppable throughout the 17th edition of the IPL, crushed Sunrisers Hyderabad in the summit clash by eight wickets to add a third trophy to their cabinet on Sunday.

"The moment that ball bowled to Abhishek Sharma came out of Mitchell Starc's hands, it was game over. It was destined to be the best ball of the IPL — an absolute peach at a time when it was so important," Hayden told Star Sports Cricket Live.

Former England batter Kevin Pietersen said Starc's ability to get his wrist position right towards the end of IPL and cranking up extra pace along with Narine's all-round ability bolstered KKR.

"Mitchell Starc was averaging around 136-137 kph during the majority of the season. But in the last two weeks he has gone above 140 kph and that is his average. He is bowling fast," Pietersen said.

"We never saw him swing the ball for the first seven, (or) maybe even eight weeks of this tournament. (But) in the last few weeks, he has got his wrist in a good place and started to swing the ball back," he added.

Pietersen was lavish in praise of Narine, saying that the KKR veteran gave his critics a perfect reply.

"I was one of the most vocal critics at the start of the tournament saying I didn't like Sunil Narine at the top of the order, due to his inconsistency. He would typically hit a six and then get out, disrupting the momentum," Pietersen said.

"However, this season he has been consistent. He has thought like a batter, batted like a batter and got the runs of a batter. He has averaged more than many batters and his strike rate has been phenomenal. He has played both sides of the wicket exceptionally well."

"We don't need to say much about his bowling — he is an out-and-out superstar. His ability to change his action and still produce such impressive numbers is quite something. He is the heart and soul of this outfit," Pietersen said.

Former India batter Ambati Rayudu, meanwhile, credited KKR captain Iyer, coaching staff as well as the team's domestic talent for coming together.

"Shreyas Iyer has been tremendous in terms of leading KKR, and we should give him a lot of credit. He was not in the best of forms with the bat, but still, the way he has led the team, the way he has used his resources, is commendable," Rayudu said.

Rayudu said a huge tally of runs from an individual is not as crucial as the others contributing collectively. (PTI)

# It was one of those days: SRH assistant coach Simon Helmot

**CHENNAI, May 27:** It was all down to a few good deliveries, said Sunrisers Hyderabad assistant coach Simon Helmot as he tried to explain his team's poor batting performance in the IPL final against Kolkata Knight Riders, conceding that the plan to be aggressive fell flat quite early in the match.

SRH were hammered by eight wickets after putting just 113 runs on the board. KKR overhauled the target in just over 10 overs to claim their third IPL trophy on Sunday night.

"We were not going to change our brand or approach. We wanted to be aggressive but also smart and work the situations through," Helmot said in the post-match press conference.

"Our plan certainly wasn't to get bowled out for 113 in the 18th over. We played in a really positive way, but a few good deliveries (from KKR bowlers) early on put us on the back foot. Unfortunately, it was one of those days," he added.

Batting first, the SRH top-order failed to get going, with the three batters getting dismissed for single figures. Big-hitting opener Travis Head fell for his third duck in four matches, dismissed by left-arm pacer Vaibhav Arora.

"Travis is experienced in playing left-arm pace. We have had games where both he and Abhishek (Sharma) have scored runs," the Australian said.

"Obviously, we couldn't get as much (support) from the middle order as we would have liked, but it was a fairly good ball to get rid of him (Head)," he added.

Hailing KKR's performance this season, Helmot said the Shreyas Iyer-led franchise displayed an aggressive mentality throughout the season.

"We have got to give credit to KKR. They have had a great season, winning 79 per cent of their games and playing an aggressive brand with the bat, ball and on the field. But, we will come (back) hard next season," he continued. (PTI)

# Boxing World Qualifiers: Boro wins opening round bout, Laura loses

**BANGKOK, May 27:** Former world youth champion Ankushita Boro defeated Namun Monkhor of Mongolia in 60kg category but Abhimanyu Laura lost against Ireland's Kelyn Cassidy in 80kg division in the second Boxing World qualifiers for Paris Olympics here on Monday.

Boro started strongly against her young Mongolian opponent. She effectively blunted Monkhor's speedy movements by tactically shifting gears to carve out a 4-1 win after three keenly-contested rounds.

However, it was an opposite result for Laura. The National Championships bronze medalist came into the second-round clash high on confidence after beating Bulgaria's 10-time national champion Kristiyan Nikolov in a thrilling bout.

But Cassidy was well prepared for the long reach of his opponent and went on to win 0-5 despite Laura giving his all in the final round.

On Tuesday, Sachin Siwach (57kg), Abhinash Jamwal (63.5kg) and Nishant Dev (71kg) will look to continue their march towards securing an Olympic quota place. This tournament is the final chance for the boxers to book a Paris Games berth.

Sachin will face Frederik Jensen of Denmark, Jamwal will take on Colombia's Jose Manuel Viafara Fory and Nishant Dev will be up against Otgonbaatar Byamba-Erdene of Mongolia.

India have already secured three quotas for the Paris Games. Nikhat Zareen (women's 50kg), Preeti (54kg) and Tokyo Olympics bronze medalist Lovlina Borgohain (75kg) have confirmed their Paris berths by winning bronze medals at the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.

India fielded seven men and three women boxers in the second World Qualifiers and five of them received opening round byes. (PTI)



# Starc hints at quitting one format to open doors for more franchise cricket

**CHENNAI, May 27:** After resisting the lure of lucrative private leagues for almost a decade because of his commitment towards the 'Baggy Green', Australian pacer Mitchell Starc has hinted that he might quit one format to make room for more franchise cricket in his schedule.

While the 34-year-old didn't specify the format he intends to give up, it is likely to be ODIs considering that the next 50-over World Cup is in 2027.

Starc, who was bought for a record 24.75 crore by Kolkata Knight Riders, was magnificent in the business end of the tournament. He ended up with 17 wickets, including five in the two knock-out games, to engineer a dominant title triumph for the Shah Rukh Khan-owned team.

To a query from PTI as to how he would take it up from here after his best year in franchise cricket, Starc hinted that T20s could gain prominence in his roster.

"For the last nine years, I certainly prioritised Australian cricket. I have pulled out often to have a chance to give my body a break and spend some time away from cricket with my wife as well, so that's certainly been where my head has been for last nine years," Starc said after his match-winning 2/14 in the IPL final against Sunrisers Hyderabad.

"Moving forward, I am certainly close to the end of my career than the start. One format may be dropped off as there is long time till next World Cup and whether that format drops off or not, that will open doors for a lot of franchise cricket," the 'King of Swing' said.

He mentioned that this year's IPL will help him in preparing for the T20 World Cup in West Indies starting June 1.

"...that's the other side of benefit of being here, some amazing players in an amazing tournament and great lead up to WT20

and success has been fantastic. It is great that a lot of players are in good position heading into the World Cup," he said.

He is hopeful of turning up for KKR even next year. "I don't know the schedule exactly but I have thoroughly enjoyed and hope to be back next year and hopefully, seen in purple and gold again."

Starc, like many others, agreed that the Impact Player rule led to tall scores in the IPL and the World T20 won't witness insane totals like 270. He said he foresees more help for spinners from worn-out tracks.

"T20 is not as physically demanding as Test cricket and it's been warm, humid, so that plays a part but that's fine. It would be cooler there in the West Indies than here," he said when asked how his body is holding up after two months of IPL.

"There's the Impact Player Rule here and that's not the case in the World Cup and after that you have to put a team that's more balanced and you rely more on all-rounders. You can't have your batting all-rounder coming in at No. 9, like they do in IPL."

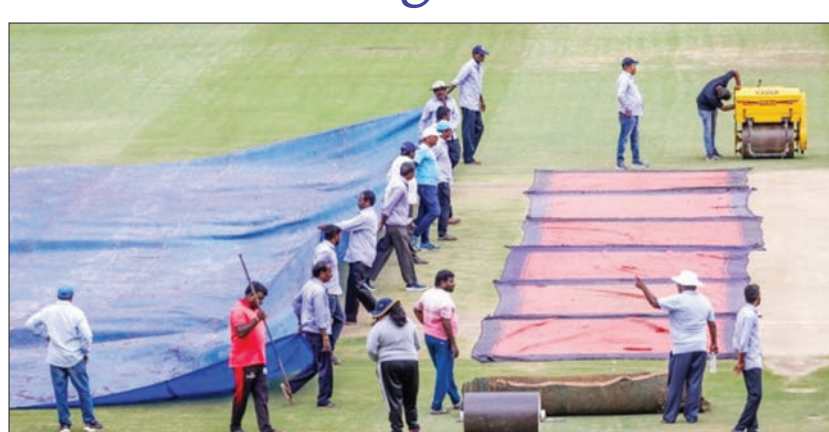
"I don't think the runs would be that much, I don't think 270 can be scored... Wickets may play a part as we have seen high-scoring matches here and wickets won't be same in West Indies."

"They might turn and will be a bit more tired, and towards end of tournament, they might pose more of a threat staying low and hope bowlers come into play more than they have come through in IPL," he said.

During the first phase where he was trying to find rhythm, Starc copped a lot of criticism and it wasn't surprising that his multi-crore price tag was an issue. He doesn't think much of that.

"You don't need extra motivation. I am here as an overseas international. It's not like for that last night (Qualifier 1) or this final that I have been brought over here. (PTI)

# Unsung heroes: BCCI announces cash rewards for IPL's groundsmen and curators



**NEW DELHI, May 27:** Describing them as "unsung heroes", BCCI secretary Jay Shah on Monday announced that groundsmen and curators of all the 10 regular IPL venues will be given ₹ 25 lakh each as a token of appreciation for providing "brilliant pitches" during the league.

The IPL concluded in Chennai on Sunday with Kolkata Knight Riders lifting their third overall trophy with an eight-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad.

"The unsung heroes of our successful T20 season are the incredible ground staff who worked tirelessly to provide brilliant pitches, even in difficult weather conditions," Shah posted on X.

"As a token of our appreciation, the groundsmen and curators at the 10 regular IPL venues will receive ₹ 25 lakhs each, and the same at the 3 additional venues will get ₹ 10 lakhs each. Thank you for your dedication and hard work!" he said.

The 10 regular venues for the IPL are Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai, Kolkata, Chandigarh, Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Lucknow, Ahmedabad and Jaipur.

The additional venues this year were Guwahati, Visakhapatnam and Dharamsala. While Guwahati was the second home venue for Rajasthan Royals, Visakhapatnam hosted Delhi Capitals' first leg of home matches.

Dharamsala served as the second base for Kings XI Punjab. This year's IPL has been talked about for high-scoring matches with the peak team total record shattered twice. The 250-run mark was crossed as many as eight times this season.

Shah also congratulated KKR for their title triumph.

"Congratulations to the @KKRiders for clinching the 2024 #TATAIPL! The team showed great consistency throughout the tournament and kudos to @ShreyasIyer15 for leading the side brilliantly."

"Once again, thank you to the fans for coming out in big numbers and for making this yet another successful season!" he said. (PTI)

**Our commitment towards Menstrual Hygiene for a safe and happy life**

# Menstrual Hygiene Day

28<sup>th</sup> May 2024

**Facts about Menstruation**

- Menstrual blood is clean, consisting of blood and body tissues.
- The food you eat does not decide the flow of your periods.
- Menstruation should not be seen as an obstacle to daily activities. You remain healthy and fit even during the menstrual period.
- The menstrual cycle can also be affected by stress, illnesses, poor nutrition or exercise.
- Menstrual cramps happen because the uterus is contracting to shed the uterine lining and blood.

**Hygiene measures to be taken during periods**

- Bathe at least once a day
- Change disposable pads/cloth pads regularly
- Used cloth pad should be washed with soap and dried in the sun
- Wash your genital area with plain water after using the toilet
- Don't use any cleaning agent like soap or deodorant inside the vagina
- Use clean undergarments and change them regularly
- Wash your hands before and after changing a sanitary napkin
- Used pads should be wrapped in a waste paper or paper cover etc. and put in a garbage bin/deep burial pit

Call 104 for Health Related Queries | Call 108 for Ambulance Service  
Call 14416 (Tele MANAS) for Mental Health Related Queries | Visit AFHC for Counselling on Health Issues